Rhode Island College
Digital Commons @ RIC

Master's Theses, Dissertations and Graduate Research Overview

Master's Theses, Dissertations and Graduate Research

5-2010

Imagining Sri Lanka

Derick Kirishan Ariyam
Rhode Island College, dariyam@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/etd

Part of the Asian Studies Commons, Cultural History Commons, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, Literature in English, North America Commons, Music Commons, Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons, Social History Commons, and the Social Policy Commons

Recommended Citation
Ariyam, Derick Kirishan, "Imagining Sri Lanka" (2010). *Master's Theses, Dissertations and Graduate Research Overview.* Paper 35.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses, Dissertations and Graduate Research at Digital Commons @ RIC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses, Dissertations and Graduate Research Overview by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ RIC. For more information, please contact kayton@ric.edu.

IMAGINING SRI LANKA:

EXPATRIATED "REVISIONS" OF THE NATION

By

Derick Kirishan Ariyam

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Master of Arts

in

The Department of English

School of Graduate Studies

Rhode Island College

2010

Introduction

As though eluding a fixed identity, the island nation located 19 miles off the coast of India has had many names over the years. During the colonial era, it had, as Michael Ondaatje writes, "seduced all of Europe" (Running 64). The country became a mirror reflecting the imagination of whomever seized it: "And so its name changed…Serendip, Ratnapida ('island of gems'), Taprobane, Zeloan, Zeilan, Seyllan, Ceilon, and Ceylon," to its latest appellation: "Sri Lanka" (Ondaatje, Running 64).

Western colonialism in Sri Lanka, dating as far back as the 16th century by Portuguese merchants, joined a once fragmented Sri Lanka—made up of several kingdoms—into one unified center of trade and commerce. However, when the last colonial force, the British, released their rule of the island in 1947, this left a now unified Sri Lanka the task of forming a government that could equitably unite the various ethnic groups that made up the country: the Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Moors, Indian Tamils, Malays, and Burghers. The extent of difference between these various cultures— differences spanning from heritage, religion, and language—and the fear of cultural dilution, as well as the still nascent memory of colonial subjection that had once simply binarized difference between "native" and "white," complicated efforts of Sri Lanka forming a fair, representative government. As a consequence, the island has endured a decades-long civil war, which mired it in racial contestation and unease that persists even until this day.

I'm from Sri Lanka—but only partly. That *em dash* separating me from the country of my birth represents an absence of over 20 years living abroad. Owing to war and civil tensions that still grip the tiny island nation, many families like mine have left Sri Lanka and entered new homes in various foreign and distant shores. Over time, this detachment from Sri Lanka can

estrange the relationship of the expatriate to their homeland—both internally within themselves and in the eyes of resident Sri Lankans. This estrangement, coupled by a feeling of foreignness to their current resident nation, often situates the expatriate in a liminal space of affected dislocation. Yet, there is still with many expatriates a desire to maintain and rebuild some attachment to their homeland. It is an impulse similar to what Salman Rushdie describes in his book Imaginary Homelands as being "haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (10).

Being between-worlds—and not wholly part of either—the expatriate's expressions of their homeland are often charged as inauthentic. Surely "physical alienation," Rushdie writes, must necessarily "give rise to profound uncertainties," being that the expatriate writing from outside "is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievable lost" (11). But as Rushdie suggests, "the broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed" (11). It is from the perspective of the expatriated Sri Lankan—their "broken mirrors"—that this thesis is primarily concerned.

This thesis is composed of fractured, fragmented glimpses of the way Sri Lanka is interrogated, re-imagined and *revisioned* from an expatriated perspective. The thesis explores the works of three Sri Lankan expatriates: the writers Shyam Selvadurai and Michael Ondaatje, and the artist M.I.A. Though all three have been charged as "inauthentic" due to their dislocated positions, this thesis seeks to reveal the various productive and complicated ways the island-nation has been configured, ironically, by those *outside* its shores. Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to assemble a framework for understanding Sri Lanka as a nation—as a community—through their works, while arguing that the plural and partial space negotiated by the expatriate

offers syncretic possibility, and is useful for revealing the complex realities of authenticity, nationalism, belonging, subjectivity.

An element linking these three expatriates together—while also placing them in one sense—outside the civil tensions in the nation is their use of the English language. Issues arising from language were the initial fuses that set off Sri Lanka's decades-long conflict. The Sinhala Only Act, which became law in 1965 replaced English with Sinhala as the official language of the country. All official business was required to be conducted in Sinhala, which is the language spoken by the majority of the population. While some viewed this as a liberating move (having just been granted independence from Britain as a former Crown Colony) others, particularly Tamil-speakers, felt immediately marginalized by this gesture. Many Tamils lost their jobs for being unable (or unwilling) to quickly learn Sinhala after the passing of this law. Minoli Salgado, in Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place, describes the acute sense of alienation in Sri Lanka that many Tamils felt: a feeling of homelessness and un-belonging (85). Further complicating these issues is a fact that Sinhala is a language with ancient roots spoken *en masse* only in Sri Lanka. The same does not apply to Tamil (Tamil is spoken widely in Southern India). Donald Smith, a professor of political science, describes the Sinhalese/Tamil conflict as an anxiety linked with cultural survival. He calls it the "Myth of Reconquest": an overall sense that culture has an ancient territorial link to a country, and when the land is "overrun by enemies," there is a need to "reconquer the land and restore the preeminence [of] sacred values" or otherwise face extinction (85).

Interestingly, the English language held a contradictory and complicated role within this whole process. Salgado tells us that colloquially in Sinhala, "English" was referred to as the *Kadwu* ("the sword"): suggesting English divides and conquers—and with a certain war-like

relish. But at the same time, English paradoxically connected and linked the various communities together—a "link language" (22). The country was seemingly more united (though colonized) under the English language than under Sinhala; under English, a common system for expression throughout the country was at least established. But English is also viewed in Sri Lanka as a type of nefarious "mask," a way to obscure one's identity, and thereby "mask" one's association to any specific cultural group or language (Salgado 22). Many critics in the literary field in Sri Lanka echo this sentiment. Sri Lankan authors who have chosen to write in English have historically not been given serious consideration. Their versions of Sri Lanka are branded inauthentic, and/or lacking cultural legitimacy (Salgado 22). As a result, critical engagement with the works of many expatriates has been sparse.

The war in Sri Lanka then, first erupting as a product of language issues, ostensibly pitted two groups of people—two ethnicities—against each other: the Tamil and Sinhalese. But the convenience of describing the conflict in categorical groupings of ethnicity, as it is often done, assumes at great risk an all-exclusiveness of involvement between the two ethnicities that is not representative of reality: not all Tamils are at war with Sinhalese, not all Sinhalese are at war with Tamils. But the very articulation of the conflict as "cultural" can sometimes reproduce and support those same contentions. The love affair at the center of Shyam Selvadurai's novel Funny Boy is an example of this. The deep-seated love-interest between a Tamil woman and a Sinhalese man is eventually torn asunder, not by the couple themselves, but rather by external forces (parental figures) that (re)project a perceived incompatibility between the two cultures. Sadly, in Selvadurai's novel, the couple gives way to the pressure of these forces and breaks their relationship.

In addition to their location as both outsiders and insiders and their use of the English language, I chose these three expatriates because their works challenge notions of inauthenticity by writing from varied unrepresented positions in Sri Lanka—in effect, they challenge the boundaries that contain/exclude/ignore them. An author like Shyam Selvadurai for instance, gay and born of a mixed Tamil and Sinhalese background (now living in Canada), does not neatly fall into any category provided for him. Many of his novels about Sri Lanka provide a portrait of growing up gay in Sri Lanka and the challenges of identity that occur— especially in a country where being gay is still considered criminal. Though living in Canada now, Selvadurai admits in his autobiographical introduction to the short story collection Story-Wallah: Short Fiction from South Asian Writers that were he in Sri Lanka, "the very real threat of physical violence and intimidation might have stopped [him] from exploring [themes of gay liberation and feminism]" (2). Interestingly, his position living outside of the boundaries of Sri Lanka now provide a glimpse of a Sri Lanka that has always existed for him, but was historically marginalized and silenced.

Michael Ondaatje on the other hand, well known for his Booker-prize winning novel The English Patient, reminds us that Sri Lanka is not just a country of Tamils and Sinhalese, but is shared by other groups as well. Ondaatje is a Sri Lankan Burgher, a Eurasian ethnic group introduced through the local intermarrying of early European colonial settlers (mostly Dutch) with native Sri Lankans. His ethnicity alone is an interesting product of colonialism that has a clearly hybridized track. In a sense, it represents a site of possibility of synthesis rather than exclusion at the interstices of seemingly fixed cultures and boundaries. His works have suffered fierce reproach by critics in Sri Lanka for inauthenticity due to claims of alleged compromised exoticism (Kanaganayakam 40). Having been born in Sri Lanka, growing up most of his life in

England, and finally settling in Canada, the itinerant Ondaatje writes of Sri Lanka from those perspectives. His Sri Lanka-of-the-Mind—as Salman Rushdie might call it—is no less "Sri Lanka"—in fact it is more. It adds to the possible range of ways to *think* Sri Lanka. Rushdie, in defense of the distortions of memory and the freedom of writing in exile, suggests in Imaginary Homelands that expatriates take great risk in "pushing the work to the limits of what is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what it is possible to think" (15).

Mathangi "Maya" Arulpragasam—or as she is more popularly known, M.I.A.—is an expatriated Sri Lankan artist well known around the globe for her music. Her album Arular (named after her father) and the widely successful Kala (named after her mother), alongside her visual performances have won her countless doting fans and a litany of critical accolades. Her father's political affiliations with a group critical of the Sri Lankan government made him *persona non grata* in the eyes of many in the country. As a result, M.I.A. and her family were forced to relocate to several different countries, arriving eventually to England as a refugee. This sense of exile and of being a refugee with severed ties to her homeland is featured heavily in her works. She uses her dislocation as a site of possibility and has produced works with incredible inventiveness. The thesis explores some of the ways this expatriated artist expands the range of expressing—and thinking—"Sri Lanka."

This thesis is divided into four sections. The first begins with a look at Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family. The memoir traces the author's own revisit to his homeland after a long absence. It is an interesting portrait of Sri Lanka: one of wonder and exotic interest as well as reclamation and remembrance. Critics residing in Sri Lanka, however, have charged this portrait as being an "inauthentic" representation of the country. But Ondaatje, launching from his own space of being both Sri Lankan and not Sri Lankan, or as he writes it, "I am the

foreigner; I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner," reveals that "authenticity" is an unstable notion to begin with—let alone adhere to. Ondaatje uses his own space of dislocation as a site of opportunity to indulge in a seemingly unbounded impulse to reproduce his homeland in a territory without limits or referential constraints—a homeland existing in his own mind. His ability to map this territory and the quality and texture of the presentation raises questions about how much of anyone's perceptions of home and country are largely imaginary in nature.

These notions of the "imaginary" are expanded upon in section two. Section two begins with a look at some theoretical notions of nationalism posited by key theorists. In Benedict Anderson's work, Imagined Communities, as well as the collected essays on nationalism, Nation and Narration edited by Homi Bhabha, we see that this illusory quality of national identity and community is a concept long established and supported. Following this theoretical discussion is a close applied reading of these ideas in Shyam Selvadurai's first novel Funny Boy. In this reading, I highlight the moments that a national consciousness, composed of a multiplicity of narratives, is passed onto the individual. I argue, however, that due to the dislocated position of the novel's protagonist, he is able to resist a narrative that seeks to marginalize him. He reveals that the location of the nation, being one framed in the mind, is limitless and multiple, holding possibilities of revision and inclusion. The section closes with an analysis of a chapter from Funny Boy that juxtaposes the real against the imaginary in the context of journalists interrogating the "truth" in a national climate that seeks to repress or distort it. What is ultimately revealed is that certain binaristic notions are largely unstable, including "real" and "imaginary"—evoking a need for revisions.

This need for revisions to the dominant conceptions of the nation is discussed in the next section. The multiplicity of national narratives and its engagement with the subjective and the

imaginary, hint at the possibility that other narratives may also exist. Postcolonial studies have long wrestled with the recovery of histories from those that have been "written-out" due to their own subjugated positions. These figures are referred to as "subalterns." In this section, I explore the ways the subaltern can be seen as emerging within some of the works of the expatriated Sri Lankan writer Michael Ondaatje. In his novel Anil's Ghost, I argue that the work's supposed inauthenticity is a result of a gesture towards the existence of the subaltern. I also look at Ondaatje's poem, "The Cinnamon Peeler," a poem, I argue, whose central focus is the disarticulation of the subaltern figure. The possibility of narratives beyond the visible—beyond the master narratives of a nation—further destabilizes notions of inauthenticity and call for the need for revisions to the way histories are formed.

The final section of this thesis provides a glimpse at the syncretic possibility of the expatriate's dislocated position with a look at the loud, colorful and rhythmic performance of the artist M.I.A. The Sri Lankan hip-hop artist and visual performer M.I.A., an exile from Sri Lanka forced to enter the U.K. as a refugee, demonstrates how dislocation can indeed be a productive site of departure. Being between worlds and severed from her homeland, Sri Lanka, she transforms "disadvantage" into a creative form of expression.

Mapping out Territory

Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family is an example of a work that straddles the threshold of the expatriated writer. The work, which is hard to categorize (and often simply called "fictionalized-memoir") is the writer's personal attempt to retrace his family's history and culture, to which he's been a stranger for many years: "In my mid-thirties I realized I had slipped past a childhood I had ignored and not understood" (22). For over 25 years, Michael Ondaatje had been away from Sri Lanka. In 1954, after the divorce of his parents, he left the island-nation at the age of nine and moved to England for a few years—finally setting in Canada with his mother in 1962 (Girton). In Canada, he would begin what he acknowledges as a distant and forgotten relationship to his homeland. But, after twenty-five years in Canada, and after the death of his parents, he takes on the task of rediscovering the other half of his identity.

Ondaatje realizes that remapping the links of his family ancestry—one spanning several generations—requires understanding and coming to terms with not just family heritage, but a country and culture he has been removed from for so many years. And as such, being an outsider and an insider, he recognizes the split identity to which he must confront and negotiate—that of both the native and the foreigner: "I am the foreigner; I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner" (79). He is guided through this rediscovery of both his family's past and Sri Lanka through the recalling of memories, stories, tall-tales, and myths, that his Sri Lankan Aunt Phyllis in Jaffna is only too eager to share. These recollections transcribed in the work are often fragments of memory and stories told and retold differently, rambling towards the goal of organizing family history:

> [We] will trade anecdotes and faint memories, trying to swell them with the order of dates and asides, interlocking them [….] No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story

> with additions and this time a few judgments thrown in. In this way history is organized (26)

Ondaatje deals in what Rushdie calls, "broken mirrors, some of whose fragments are irretrievable lost" (12). These fragments, partial truths, "a few judgments," complimented by a scattering of research, results in a book whose arrangement reflects these qualities.

The arrangement of the book is eclectic and fluid. The work crosses genres. Embedded within the work are journal-entries, short stories, poetry, memoir and history. It is seemingly a textual collage, but as Helen Hoy strongly argues it is, "organic and not collage, rather it's the scrupulous dissection—anatomization—of consciousness" (330-31). By evading fixed determinations of style, form, and genre, his work can be read as a performance of his unmapped, indeterminate and hyphenated subjectivity. What inevitably results is something new: a different angle on the nation that Ondaatje still calls home. To borrow a formulation of Rushdie's, it is a "Sri-Lanka-of-the-Mind"—one of its imagined representations, which the author invites us to consider.

Overall, Sri Lankan critics have been predominantly scathing in their review of Running in the Family, particularly in the way the book portrays the country. The litany of charges range from over-exoticizing the homeland, inauthenticity, a lack of referentiality, writing in "excess," or as Chelva Kanaganayakan finds the writing as being, "oblivious of the realties that edge its complacent vision of itself" (39). What these critics deny Ondaatje is a singularity of purpose and the uniqueness of his between-world position. Further, these charges brought against Ondaatje's work reveal contradictions within themselves, as Ajay Heble thoughtfully points out:

> We might...ask whether [the] argument itself, in presupposing the very possibility of representing cultural authenticity is an essentialist distortion of indigenous culture. Can we speak about Sri Lanka as though its culture offered a unified and unproblematic example of otherness or anti-colonial resistance? Need all immigrant writers respond to

colonial pasts in the [same] way? (187)

But what many critics fail to recognize is that Ondaatje does not attempt to disguise what might be viewed as his comprised colonial subjectivity. Instead, he embraces it, foregrounds it, and treats it as a point of departure rather than disability.

Minoli Salgado, in her insightful chapter on Ondaatje's work entitled "Place as Palimpsest," draws attention to the opening pages of the book, in which is presented a map of the island of Sri Lanka alongside two epigraphs. She points out how the map is notable for its "omissions" (Salgado 132). Only a few cities are labeled, a few rivers and lakes, and just a handful of other places of interest. It resembles the yet unchartered sites of a map-in-progress from the age of colonial exploration. Of the two epigraphs, one originates from the 14th century from a Franciscan Friar, in the dawn of the island's "discovery" by the Western world, the second a contemporary news-clipping from a Sri Lankan newspaper. The Franciscan Friar observes: "I saw in this island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads ... and other miraculous thing which I will not here write of" (9). The second epigraph, from a Sri Lankan journalist, a Mr. Amarasekera, presents a different sentiment, one with deep implied irony suggesting, what Salgado points out as, the "arrogance of Western mapping of other people's realities" (132): "The Americans were able to put a man on the moon because they knew English. The Sinhalese and Tamils whose knowledge of English was poor, thought that the earth was flat" (9).

The map and the two epigraphs complement the overarching sentiments and purpose of Ondaatje's work while foregrounding the complicated migrant space Ondaatje is attempting to navigate. They reveal what Salgado calls a "self-avowedly cartographic" impulse in Ondaatje's work (132). In a conversation with Linda Hutcheon Ondaatje admits that his aim in Running in

the Family was "to establish a kind of map; I wanted to make clear that this was just part of a tradition of invasions" (Hutcheon 201). This "tradition of invasions," as the incomplete map and two epigraphs suggest, result in problematic "mappings," and a confession by the writer that his work must inevitably contain uncertainties. Among them of course may be the fantastical exoticizing notions, like the Franciscan Friar's 14th century depiction of the country, juxtaposed with the contrasting ironic predisposition on colonialism, and perhaps resulting in the incompleteness of any "mapping" endeavor.

This "mapping" impulse which courses through the pages of Running in the Family can also be seen as one informed by and charted in the realm of the imaginary. It is, I argue, the reconstituting, and re-discovery of an "imaginary Sri Lanka" depicted in this work that Ondaatje wishes to highlight and explore. The territory set to be "re-colonized" by Ondaatje and his "cartographic" endeavor has never been for him a physical one but rather an imaginary one—that "Sri Lanka-of-the-Mind."

There are many ways the work reveals its own investment and commerce with the imaginary. I argue that the structure of the work for instance (being cross-genre) holds a dual purpose. The first, as aforementioned, relates to Ondaatje's between-world and thus *unbounded* identity. The second, and what I argue as the more crucial purpose, is to reproduce and resemble the organizational structure of the imaginary realm. This realm, which gives substance to the "Sri Lanka-of-the-Mind" formation, is one seemingly chaotic, disjoint, but yet, as Helen Hoy had remarked "organic" (331). Within it is necessarily an intermingling of fiction, memory (memoir), fantasy, myth and superstition, and some research without any strict appeals to chronology. It is an archive of found objects, fragments, stories heard, stories told, stories silenced or repressed.

The chapter entitled "Tongue" provides a glimpse of the variety of material recorded in this work and how Ondaatje adroitly navigates through these various genres. This chapter is entirely devoted to two Sri Lankan reptiles, the kabragoya and the thalagoyas. Ondaatje combines research, personal history and myth while discussing these common and indigenous creatures of Sri Lanka. He cites one of the first travelers to the Island, a Sir John Maundeville who records (in archaic English) his wondrous citing of a thalagoyas, as having "schorte thyes and grete Nayles" (73). Ondaatje continues like a scrupulous naturalist recording dietary particulars, behavior, preying habits, etc., for these two reptiles giving special attention to the tongue of the thalagoyas: "a rasping tongue that 'catches' and hooks objects" (73). Ondaatje then slides into myth, discussing how, if "a child is given thalagoyas tongue to eat he will become brilliantly articulate, will always speak beautifully , and in his speech be able to 'catch' and collect humorous information." This is followed by painstakingly detailed instructions on the proper way to serve thalagoyas tongue to acquire its "special" effects, to which if followed precisely then, "years later [it] will result in verbal brilliance, though sometimes this will be combined with bad behavior (the burning of furniture, etc.)" (74). To the question of side effects he preempts: "I am not sure what other side effect there are apart from possible death" (74). Ondaatje tells us that his Uncle Noel was given a thalagoyas tongue and "became a brilliant lawyer, and a great story teller" (74). And in an ambiguous and dismissive fashion Ondaatje himself hints at a memory of his being given the tongue as a child in a resthouse in Ambalantota, suggesting—coyly—that the "tongue" may be the source of his own ability to write this work.

Chapters like "Tongue" with its copious angles of reflection and incident may seem to warrant those charges made against the author of writing in "excess." However such a claim fails to account for, what I argue, is the book's intentional design in reproducing the imaginary

context to which Ondaatje's Sri Lanka is founded. It is a thought similar to what R.J. Davis describes as the work's progressive "awakening [to] consciousness" (269). Davis points to Ondaatje's "overcrowding of data"; citing another chapter, "Honeymoon," he references the chapter's crowding of "newsclips, flashes of miscellanea ranging from the death of Fred Astaire's sister to the decrease of pythons in Africa to Charlie Chaplin's visit to Ceylon" (270). Davis concludes by suggesting that the writer is implying "he would rather record stimuli than risk losing them, even at the cost of rational and traditionally accepted novelistic structure" (270). Where I differ, slightly, with Davis is by suggesting that this recording of a hodgepodge of stimuli is part of and contributes to the intentional *mise en scène* Ondaatje is trying to develop: claiming his landscape of Sri Lanka as one residing in the mind.

In addition, there is a discourse of "invention" running conspicuously throughout the novel. This conscious play with "invention" seems to nullify critical charges pointing to the novel's seeming "inauthenticity"—for invention does not have a reference point to authenticate to. As Graham Huggan suggests, Ondaatje is cognizant of the "impossibility of his autobiographical task," and he goes on to rhetorically ask "How can [Ondaatje] retrieve the past if he is simultaneously reinventing it?" (Huggan)

Invention and reinvention, which Ondaatje freely engages in, is an important and necessary facet of the book and complements the framing of the imaginary Sri Lanka. One way this is demonstrated is by the loose scattering of photos throughout the book. The photos are black and white snapshots from the Ondaatje family album depicting a moment in time of the family with little or no contextual information provided. One photo of his mother and father (making silly faces at each other) is the only one Ondaatje has of his parents together. The absence of captions or context to the images requires in part "invention" to provide continuity to

their narrative. These are some of the "broken mirrors" of whose "fragments have been irretrievably lost" which Rushdie describes in the essay "Imaginary Homelands." Rushdie goes on to further describe the usefulness of their reconstitution, stating that it is:

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

Ondaatje as a Sri Lankan writer, Minoli Salgado observes, "highlights how contexts are invented rather than found" (129). In addition, continuity for the photos and their "status" and "resonance" in the narrative must be extrapolated by the reader's imagination as well: Ondaatje is essentially allowing the reader to participate in his journey of re-imagining Sri Lanka.

Keeping close company with invention are the discourses of "rumor" and "gossip" featured heavily throughout the work. There are even chapter headings, like the opening titled "Asian Rumours," and another "Tropical Gossip" highlighting the book's willingness to consider and reproduce items of dubious authenticity. Graham Huggan, reading Running in the Family as a bastardized travel memoir, suggests that the book exploits particular liberties the travel memoir affords: "the authority of the witness, the emphasis on strangeness, the delight in rumour, the recourse to myth" (Huggan). Ondaatje is establishing what Graham calls an implicit "complicitous relationship" with his readers by playfully indulging in these exotic escapades of the imagination (18). As such, Ondaatje, having this supposed agreement with the reader to entertain these exoticized notions of his homeland, and scrupulously record and indulge in retelling them, purports the book is not meant to be an objective history of the nation. These "fictions" instead serve to help support Ondaatje's project of reproducing a illusory Sri Lanka-

of-the-Mind by recording how much of its creation is dependent on the imagination and one's own subjectivity (and subjective activities like inference and invention).

Furthermore, the palimpsestic quality of Ondaatje's text of Sri Lanka, a notion Minoli Salgado first postulated, is a useful concept to consider when discussing the Imagined Sri Lanka being forged by this work. According to Salgado, Ondaatje creates a Sri Lanka "whose territory is subject to simultaneous inscription and erasure as [he] moves across multiple sites of belonging, writing betwixt and between cultural narratives and histories in a process of subject constitution" (128). Such a reading invites one to reconsider how to approach this work. That is, rather than reading the book as a portrait of Sri Lanka, or even a portrait of Ondaatje's family, to read it as "layers" on top of the physical territory of the nation—where the blurred remnants and ghost-images of prior erasures and reinscriptions may (or may not) resemble the familiar territory of one's own portrait of the island. The layers complicate the perspective and color the way events are drawn and charted via personal subjectivities, sensibilities, rumors, gossip, invention, fears, desires and emotions.

Returning to the "mapping" impulse that Ondaatje admits to Linda Hutcheon as his primary impetus for writing, what then is the territory being charted? In fact, it is the entire text that becomes the "territory" Ondaatje is endeavoring to "map." The original map of the island appearing on the opening page can be read as a simulacrum for the book itself—not the physical territory of the island. Thus all the referentiality is inclusive within the world (the island) that is the text. To impose referentiality outside the book, to apply an image of the city of Jaffna for instance to another Sri Lanka—the "Sri Lanka" of Ondaatje's critics perhaps—would be transplanting referentiality outside its intended realm and to another world altogether.

While this Sri Lanka-of-the-Mind, the product of between-world writers, has been explored in this section as it pertains to Ondaatje's Running in the Family, this idea of an imaginary nation is a concept closely linked to nationalism itself. It is a concept deeply elaborated in the seminal text on nationalism by Benedict Anderson, Imaginary Communities. In the next section, I will examine more specifically the links between the individual and the nation, and how they are revealed in the work of another expatriated Sri Lankan writer, Shyam Selvadurai in his novel Funny Boy.

The Emergence of National Consciousness

Nations are not fixed determinate structures. Their forms are more nebulous, more fluid, and more personal than one might at first believe. Homi Bhabha, in Nation and Narration writes of these structures: "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only full realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1). His formulation positions nations immediately into the realm of the "ambivalent": a place that "haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write it and the lives of those who live it" (Bhabha 1).

There is, of course, an initial sense of incompatibility between the terms "nation" and the "mind's eye." The "public" nature of the word "nation" confronts the rather intimate "private" sphere of the "mind's eye." Bhabha goes on to acknowledge that such illusory and "excessively metaphorical" formulations of the nation may seem "impossibly romantic," however he rightly asserts that it is from "these traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges" (1).

Bhabha's conception of the nation is in keeping, and largely informed by Benedict Anderson's formulation of the nation. In his highly influential work Imagined Communities Anderson defines the nation as an "imaginary community," where in the mind "lives the image

[of] communion" (6). Before Anderson's Imagined Communities, theoretical works accounting for the existence, complexity, and passions inherent in nations and nationhood were sparse. The next most comprehensive exegesis on nationalism prior to Anderson belonged to Hugh Seton-Watson. Yet even by his own admission, Seton-Watson confesses to the ultimate incompleteness of his charge: "Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no 'scientific definition' of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists" (3). But it was Anderson who postulated that the linkages that connected a wide group of people under the sovereignty of a unified national body were linkages whose connections were imaginary in nature. In essence, Anderson argues that the conception of a nation is a social construction, whose presence is not reflected tangibly, but rather, exists in the minds of each of its denizens. To think "Sri Lanka," or to identify as Sri Lankan, is to imagine a communion between yourself and its 20 million other denizens. Anderson calls this "a deep horizontal comradeship"—a "comradeship" despite the "actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each" (indeed the case for Sri Lanka) (7). As such, this communion being housed in the mind is subject to distortions, exaggerations, personal bias, racial prejudices, and the like: the nation and its conception are both a personal and shared manifestation of one's own consciousness.

A reading of Sri Lankan-born writer Shyam Selvadurai's first novel Funny Boy complements these theoretical notions of nationalism. Funny Boy can be read as a chronicling of how the communion between the individual and the nation (in this case Sri Lanka) is nurtured, developed, and complicated in the mind and how public cultural conceptions of a nation enter one's consciousness and inscribe a national narrative within the individual. As the reader witnesses these narratives play out in the novel, it can help provide a framework for understanding some of the racial tensions that haunt Sri Lanka. In the novel, these tensions

between individual and nation, are explored in the life of the young protagonist Arjun "Arjie" Chelvaratnam as he grows out of childhood and into adolescence.

Young Arjie's life at the onset of the novel bears all the naïveté and innocence typical of childhood. The first chapter begins in the world of lofty childhood imaginings. Arjie describes the fanciful games of his early years, on those special days ("spend-a-days" he calls it) when his parents would leave him with his grandparents to play alongside his siblings and numerous cousins. There, he and the rest of the children would indulge in their fanciful imaginations; the favorite role-play fantasy being "bride-bride" (a wedding-day reenactment). The bride, the focal point, is a part Arjie would always be permitted to play: "because of the force of my imagination, I was selected as leader. Whatever the game…it was I who discovered some new way to enliven it" (4). Weddings can be thought of as nation-building ceremonies: a narrative of union. Arjie, by wearing the bridal gown, is subverting this narrative.

The power of Arjie's imagination is at its height in the first chapter of the novel. But external forces eventually check the force and liberality of it, specifically the incursion of underlying national narratives—something the title of the chapter forebodes: "Pigs Can't Fly." Eventually, one of Arjie's aunts discovers him glamorously adorned in his "spend-a-day" adventures. This begins the unraveling of his (private) protected imaginary world. When Aunt Kanthi happens to walk in during a game of "bride-bride" and sees Arjie dressed in a wedding sari, garlanded with all the trimmings of a bride-to-be, she grabs him by the ear to expose this peculiarity—this "funniness"—to the adults in the other room. The label "funny" is first applied here to Arjie by his uncle: "Ey Chelva...looks like you have a funny one here" (14). The word "funny" is interestingly ironic and ambiguous. Arjie is playing at a ceremony that is revered by the national narrative, but only when it is adhered to in a certain prescriptive way: between a

female and a male constrained to certain roles, decorum, and dress. Arjie's "game" of bride-bride is "funny" because it subverts and distorts the narrative. In addition, the label "funny" applied here to Arjie, "disorients [his] sense of meaning and comprehension" (Jayawickrama 1). The word is used to insult Arjie. Yet Arjie is puzzled: what can be so shameful? Being the bride for Arjie felt glorious. It was like a transformation to what Arjie calls a "more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palu, seemed to revolve" (5). This initial moment of ambiguity and perplexity by Arjie is a symptom of a narrative that has not been inscribed yet in his mind. What was thought to be wonderful by Arjie must be *learned* to be "wrong"—it must be aligned to *that* national narrative.

When Arjie is exhibited in front of the adult world, in front of his uncles, aunts, grandparents, and the threatening eyes of his mother and father, it marks an expulsion from the playful imaginary world that Arjie was accustomed to. He can no longer be permitted to indulge in a world of his own private imaginations. His private world must conform to the accepted practices and cultural expectations of the public/shared one. The imagined world of his parents—an extension of the larger imaginary world of Sri Lanka—has no room for "funny boys."

Like an eviction from paradise, Arjie's eviction from his private world of fanciful imaginations, bride-bride and wedding saris, have left him with a great sense of loss: new strictures to the world he lives in, a new boundary to the territory of the mind, knowledge of the good and evil of social and conventions and taboos. This "Sri Lanka," the world brought to him by his interaction with his family members, is a world that regards him with suspicion and censures boys that like to dress up in women's clothing—fantasy or not. It is not long until his world is further enlarged and a conception of Sri Lanka is imposed on him by forces outside the

family. It is another aunt that brings this world to him: Aunt Radha.

Arjie's parochial mindset is revealed during his first introduction to Aunt Radha. Forewarned of her arrival, and having listened-in covertly to talk of a marriage proposal in-waiting for this aunt, Arjie's general excitement over the pageantry of weddings rekindles. Mr. Rajan Nagendra has extended a marriage proposal to Aunt Radha (arranged marriages are still common in Sri Lanka). Nagendra is a man commended by the fact that he's an engineer, "works for a big company in America," and "very well off" (41). This is complemented by the fact that he also "doesn't drink or womanize" and there is no evidence of "insanity in the family" (41). Later on, during a conversation Arjie has with Radha Aunty, she asks him whether he thinks she should accept the marriage proposal. He responds in the affirmative, and when questioned "why?" his answer is an echo of what he overheard the adults say: "because he's an engineer and he doesn't have insanity in his family" (49-50). Embedded in his act of mimicry is the suggestion of the passing on of a narrative from adult to child, from external to internal; the imagined conception the adults share of an ideal (Sri Lankan) husband is being reproduced by Arjie.

But there is certain malleability to Arjie's imagination. As will be later seen, Arjie makes adjustments to the inherited preconceptions instilled in his mind; he is able to re-imagine and re-evaluate his notions against reality. Like Ondaatje, Arjie is able to map out his own "Sri Lanka of-the-mind," to which he makes adjustments, erasures and inscriptions throughout the novel. Arjie demonstrates what Bhabha calls the "temporality" of the national construction, by offering resistance to the "complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them the immanent subject and objects of a range of social and literary narratives" (Nation 292). In a sense, he reveals that "Sri

Lanka" is not a fixed determinate set of ideas to be inculcated, but is fluid, multiple, and can be subverted and capable of revisions.

However, this fluidity to a national conception—its ability to be revised—is contrasted against a backdrop of national prejudices and racial tensions ongoing in Sri Lanka. Arjie's first glimpse (and the reader's) into the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict occurs during Radha's entrance into the novel. What begins as innocent coquetry between a young man named Anil, who is attracted to Radha, turns into embittered racial conflict between the two families.

The relationship begins when Radha and Anil meet each other on the set of rehearsals for a local production of "The King and I." When Radha starts receiving rides home from Anil after practice, Radha's mother (Arjie's grandmother) confronts Radha with questioning: "Who is this boy you're taking lifts from?" Eventually, Radha is coaxed into providing a last name, "Jayasinghe." Radha's mother has a fit, "A Sinhalese! I knew it!....Only a Sinhalese would be impertinent enough to offer an unmarried girl a lift" (56). The remark made by the mother is laden with troublesome racial prejudice.

Arjie is utterly confounded by the whole matter. It is in Arjie's inner-dialogue—the naïve and impressionable dialogue of a child—that interesting questions are being reflected regarding the source of his grandmother's paroxysm against the Sinhalese:

> The intensity of Ammachi's reaction had shaken me. I wondered why Anil's being Sinhalese upset her so. I was in a Sinhala class at school and my friends were Sinhalese. My parent's best friends were, too...So what did it matter whether Anil was Sinhalese or not? (57)

It all seemed paradoxical to Arjie: something, deeper, personal and imaginary, seemed to whet his grandmother's rage.

Arjie eventually begins to unlock the context for his grandmother's charged remarks when he approaches his father (initially as an attempt to learn the meaning of "racist"). His father

satisfies the boy's curiosity and begins to discuss the origins of the country's ethnic tensions. He locates the Sinhala Only Act as the catalyst: "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" (60). Arjie's understanding of this conflict is being (tersely) transmitted to him through these remembrances of his father. Originally, Arjie is ignorant of the strife between the two cultures—and in fact finds such a notion confounding. His father is linking him into the collective understanding that strife exists. His father is linking him into (one) perspective of Sri Lanka.

The racially charged domestic turmoil takes on an external footing when Radha's mother goes to confront Anil's parents to voice her disapproval of his and Radha's relationship. The reader learns later that the exchange between the parents only leaves both parties more incensed. Anil's father is deeply insulted by the gesture: "our family name has been insulted. I shall not take this lying down" (64). Anil's father goes on to impose a threat directed at Tamils generally, not just at Radha's mother: "Be careful. We Sinhalese are losing patience with you Tamils and your arrogance" (65). Anil's father, in the phrase "We Sinhalese" is taking an imagined alliance with the entire group representing his ethnicity. He is implying that a narrative is already in process wherein a characterization of "Tamils" (all inclusive) and a growing exasperation of Sinhalese (all inclusive) is developing.

Both parents can be seen as re-enacting and re-producing the narratives of contention between the Tamils and Sinhalese. Embedded within both of the differing reactions of the respective parents is an implied multiplicity of narratives (Sri Lankas)—one where Tamils are the enemy, the other where the Sinhalese are in the wrong. At one point in the novel, the civil tensions brooding over the nation start to take on a physically violent turn—especially in and

around Jaffna. Radha is beaten up during an attack against Tamils. As Arjie listens to a description of the violent scene, he negotiates the confluence between the real, the imaginary, and the mind's mediation: "[I] found myself wondering how people could be so cruel, so terrible. The scene he had described, the bottles being flung, the beatings, seemed unreal. And yet they were real, as I could see before my very eyes." (88)

The internalized narratives of discrimination, the ones produced and re-produced within the dialogues of Radha's mother and Anil's father take, on a physical manifestation. Arjie's original naïveté, especially when he first attempts to comprehend the discrimination and the basis for it (and being further perplexed) represents a more nuanced, more flexible idea of Sri Lanka. One whose communion is, as Anderson states, "imaginary," where only in the mind "lives the image [of] communion" (6).

Radha too, had maintained confused feelings regarding the racial enmity between Tamils and Sinhalese; she could not fathom why her mother held so much acrimony against the Sinhalese. However, anti-Tamil violence Radha encounters on a train changes her. Arjie notices the change: "I realized that she had changed. There was a seriousness to her face that was new, a harshness that I had never seen before" (90). When Anil hears about what happened to Radha, concern overwhelms him and he discards all pretensions of decorum or past skirmishes with Radha's family and repeatedly visits Radha's home to see how she is doing. The family will not let him in. They link him as culpable to the events that transpired: "What do you want? Haven't you people done enough?" (89). Later, when Radha recovers her senses, she also does not want to see him. Anil of course has no explicit connection to the horrible events that occur to Radha, but merely his identity as Sinhalese implicates him—makes him the unwitting accomplice to crimes committed by others of his ethnicity; it casts him a villain in the eyes of the Tamil Sri

Lankan narrative. The binaristic story of the nation's ethnic contentions gets reproduced.

The chapter closes with a quiet wedding. The original suitor proposed to Radha in the beginning of the chapter will marry her. The wedding is conducted without the usual pomp and pageantry of Sri Lankan weddings (or the ones imagined by Arjie). In fact, it is a rather somber ceremony overall. Radha marries a Tamil man, and the imaginary narrative of a Sri Lanka with ethnic incompatibility and segregation is re-produced and restored. The chapter opens with the family discussing prospective suitors for Radha, describing the ideal suitor—items Arjie mimics. Unsaid but seemingly always implied in those requirements, was one additional important prerequisite: he must also be "Tamil."

As Arjie continues to develop throughout the novel, his "funniness" continues to set him apart and relegate him pejoratively "different" in the eyes of his family. By labeling him as "funny," it suggests an "otherness" to the community, one that seems to trouble the waters of the ethnic divide. This "otherness" also produces a sense of isolation for Arjie. His funniness does not fit into the imagined conception of the nation. As the critic Sharanya Jayawickrama notes "funniness," develops into a site of resistance as well as possibility for Arjie. What was at first an ambiguity that was disorienting to Arjie earlier on in the novel—can be viewed as a site of possibility *because* of its ambivalence. Jayawickrama suggests the word "funny" articulates a resistance of identity by eluding an "essentialist notion of gender identity" (Jayawickrama 125). Arjie's sexuality then becomes, as she puts it, "a space of liminality that offers valuable potential for the author's sense of identity, home and community" (Jayawickrama 125). Sevladurai's placement of the word "funny" in the title of the novel trumpets what was once a dislocated and marginalized position. It demands to be seen, heard, and represented: if a space cannot be found for "funniness" one will be created for it—a new Sri Lankan conception outside of the binaristic,

ethnicity-based narrative of the nation.

In a final effort to fix Arjie's funniness, Arjie's father enlists him in a new school—a reformatory school that is stricter and more traditional than the one he presently attends. "The Academy will force you to become a man" he insists (205). Ironically, it is in the school that his father selectively places him, Queen Victoria Academy, that Arjie begins to come to terms with his own sexual orientation and begins the journey towards embracing it. It is there that Arjie meets a boy named Shehan. Shehan becomes the first real love-interest for Arjie. Shehan is Sinhalese, which Arjie had never considered until the end of the novel: "Something occurred to me that I had never really been conscious of before—Shehan was Sinhalese and I was not. This awareness did not change my feeling for him, it was simply there" (295). Though Sinhalese and Tamil tensions are virulently played out in the novel, Arjie and Shehan refuse to subscribe to those narrative. Instead, through their reciprocal affection and their shared lived-experiences of marginality, they together form more than just a bond: they create an imaginary space which they can inhabit together. Rather than obliterate their identities, and settle into a conception of Sri Lanka with narratives that exclude them, they expand and revise the nation's (imagined) borders, and provide a new frontier for thinking Sri Lanka.

And yet, a chapter from Funny Boy called "See No Evil, Hear No Evil" destabilizes the seemingly fixed notions, "imaginary" and "real." The chapter introduces Uncle Daryl into Arjie's life. Uncle Daryl is a childhood acquaintance (and former lover) of Arjie's mother. Like Ondaatje, Uncle Daryl is Burgher. The Burgher people are a small Eurasian ethnic minority in Sri Lanka of mostly Dutch and Portuguese ancestry, whose ties are linked to those of the European colonists who first arrived in Sri Lanka between the 16th and 20th centuries. The Burghers are known for their very fair skin, and are often mistaken for foreigners by Sri Lanka's

other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, they often hold a rank of privilege and inherited affluence compared to those of their minority peers.

Daryl has since been away in Australia for over 15 years, and has only recently arrived back to Sri Lanka. His return was precipitated by concern over some of the troublesome rumors surfacing regarding the escalated state of anxiety and violence surrounding the Sri Lankan civil war. Most concerning for Daryl are rumors suggesting acts of state terrorism being inflicted by the government on its own civilians. These "radical" suspicions are ones many find too horrible to believe, like Arjie's mother: "Amma didn't believe him when he told her this. The government was not like the old one, she said. Besides, how could this be going on and the press remain silent about it, especially now that there was 'freedom of the press'?" (107). As a journalist, Daryl begins to launch an investigation to interrogate the veracity of these allegations.

However, when Daryl brings his investigation to Jaffna (the epicenter of the nation's civil conflict), he does not arrive back home when he is supposed to. Arjie's mother, anxious and worried about Daryl's disappearance, goes to the police to file a report. Her experience at the station is less than sanguine. They harass her; look on her with undue suspicion, and flaunt their power over her. She feels helpless, afraid, and alone. A few days pass, and Daryl's body is found. She is called into the morgue to identify him. Arjie recalls the unusual moment with a numb sense of disbelief and awe: "A man I had known...was now dead. I was aware that it was a significant thing, a momentous event in my life even, but, like a newspaper report on an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, it seemed something that happened outside my reality, my world" (132). The "newspaper" that Arjie mentions is something Anderson suggests provides the "technical means for 're-representing' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (25). However, the notions of "imaginary" and "real" will become destabilized and conflated as the

newspaper form is subverted in this chapter.

The police report Daryl's death as a case of drowning—framing his death as accidental rather than suspicious. Arjie's mother does not believe this. She is convinced Daryl was killed and his body was thrown in a river. And since the government in her mind is a suspect, she is trapped with no one to turn to for help—and in fact, the police have now started to suspiciously regard her too as a threat. Desperate for help, she seeks out an uncle that happened to once be a great civil rights lawyer in the country. Her uncle advises her that trying to find information regarding Daryl's murder is too dangerous. "So what must we do?" she asks, to which her Uncle replies, "Nothing....These days one must be like the three wise monkeys. See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" (137). In effect, the uncle suggests suppressing the troubling narrative of state terror. What may have happened—what was "real" for Arjie's mother and Daryl—is being repressed and cast into the realm of uncertainty.

When a representative of the Australian newspaper where Daryl worked approaches Arjie's mother, asking her if she could comment on what she suspects happened to Daryl, she decides to heed the advice of her uncle, and feigns ignorance of the whole matter. No one will speak for the late Daryl, or as Arjie plainly states it in the close of the chapter, "Daryl Uncle's killer would never be brought to justice" (148).

This fictional account of Uncle Daryl interestingly parallels the nonfictional account of the assassination of a journalist in Sri Lanka named Lasantha Wickrematunge. Wickrematunge knew the hour of his death was at hand. Before he was assassinated he penned an editorial evocatively describing the harrowing plight he and other Sri Lankan journalists have to endure. The opening lines of his editorial effectively introduces some of these trials:

> No other profession calls on its practitioners to lay down their lives for their art save the armed forces and, in Sri Lanka, journalism. In the course of the past few years, the

> independent media have increasingly come under attack. Electronic and print-media institutions have been burnt, bombed, sealed and coerced. Countless journalists have been harassed, threatened and killed. It has been my honor to belong to all those categories and now especially the last. (Lasantha)

In the article, Wickrematunge predicts his own death and further, identifies who his killer would be. This editorial entitled, "And Then They Came For Me" was published in The Sunday Leader three days after his assassination.

Provocatively, the real-world story of Lasantha Wickrematunge placed alongside the story of Uncle Daryl conflates notions of the real-world and the imaginary-world. In addition, a close examination of the stories of Lasantha and Daryl unsettles certain binaries. The categories of "fiction" and "nonfiction" as well as the "credible" and the "incredible" can be seen as having less fixity than what might be assumed. Ultimately, definitive markings, such as fixing a singular notion of a nation, or the casting of ethnicity, or the labeling of (in)authenticity to narratives need to be considered within the context of the complexity and fluidity of their respective formulations.

The overarching national milieu that both these individuals find themselves in—the nonfictional Lasantha and the fictional Daryl—is of course a hostile military one; and one historically framed as a contention between two groups of people, as seen played out in the story of Aunty Radha and Anil's parents: the Sinhalese and the Tamil. Articulating the war in the rhetoric of dualism between these two ethnicities, as often done, both occludes the actual complexities of the war, as well as (re)produces an intrinsic antagonistic relationship between ethnicities. Both Lasantha and Daryl are testaments to the fact that the war is not divided strictly upon ethnicities. Although the primary recipients of government terror were Tamils, Lasantha was a Sinhalese man, and Daryl was from a Burgher background. Their acts and respective deaths demonstrate that the battle lines are not as tightly aligned around ethnicity as is often

suggested. They in effect, unsettle this rather important dichotomizing binary that has and still haunts the nation.

In addition, the mystery shrouding the deaths of both these journalists straddles the notions of belief and unbelief. In the case of Lasantha, after his assassination and after the publication of his editorial which condemned the government (which suggested that if he were to die, it would be at their hands), the Prime Minister of Sri Lankan immediately denied allegations of government complicity, peremptorily stating in an interview, "no one knows what happened" (Thottam). This statement is in direct contradiction to what Lasantha claims in his editorial before he died, in which he addresses the Prime Minister directly:

> In the wake of my death I know you will make all the usual sanctimonious noises and call upon the police to hold a swift and thorough inquiry. But like all the inquiries you have ordered in the past, nothing will come of this one, too. For truth be told, we both know who will be behind my death.

Who to believe? Where does authenticity lie? There are similar questions that surface when reading the account of Uncle Daryl.

Uncle Daryl's claims of government involvement in terror are too shocking for Arjie's mother to—at first—believe. However, later when she approaches the police for help, she is met by some of the same unsettling perceptions Daryl had long been suggesting. After Daryl's unusual disappearance and death, she starts to consider the validity of Daryl's version of Sri Lanka. The implications of this realization subvert her faith in reality—multiple conceptions of the nation emerge, contradictory ones.

The resistance writing found in both these works—and embedded in their own acts of journalism—endeavors to re-write and challenge the implied conditions of the nation; a type of writing Margaret Fee describes well as "struggling...to rewrite the dominant ideology from within, to produce a different version of reality" (171). Lasantha is convinced of certain notions

of which, he admits, cannot be easily corroborated. To entertain, even partially, the portrayals of oppression being presented by these journalists, is to hold multiple versions of "Sri Lanka." Both journalists are in effect resisting one image of Sri Lanka and offering their own. Their image of Sri Lanka is in direct opposition to the one proffered by the State— and one most civilians believe in (or at least hope to believe in).

Many of the events depicted in Funny Boy correspond directly to events in Sri Lankan history (like the 1983 Riots in the book's closing chapter). The intermixing of historic events into a fictional story unsettles the distinction between what might be considered fiction and nonfiction. The boundaries that separate these terms lose their fixity.

The idea that nonfiction/fiction are situated within a tenuous binary opposition is a larger ongoing critical discussion, and one that has generated a great degree of scholarly debate. Even critics attempting to rescue the distinctiveness of nonfiction to fiction, will often concede to the blurred boundaries that separate the two. David Lehman in Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction Over the Edge admits to the inarticulateness of the boundary while arguing that the boundary is still important: "[t]he confession that, finally, it is impossible to delineate an exact boundary between fiction and nonfiction does not mean that the boundary does not matter" (5). To Lehman, the importance of this "boundary" is founded on the "materiality of its referents" (35). To this he refers to the "flesh-and-blood" subjects that a work aims to consider. This focus on the "material referents," and Lehman's articulation of them as a "boundary" provide a useful way to understand the roles that both Lasantha and Uncle Daryl function within the confluent fronts of their respective genres. Daryl's "referents" in the fictional Funny Boy are the "material" Sri Lankan journalists (like Lasantha) that have disappeared and/or have been killed in the line of their profession. In Lasantha's editorial, the referent is self-reflexive and he points to other

members of the independent media who have similarly lost their own lives for their work. Nonfiction/fiction then, for Lehman, *approach* a "material" boundary of referents. But the "materialness" of the boundary, and the requirements for belief in even the nonfictional story of Lasantha's allegations, complicate the location of the boundary, and make its delineating marker less stable and fixed. Those who Uncle Daryl speaks for, to whom his story shadows, is a "nonfictional" element to his "fictional" story. Where the "fiction" begins and the "nonfiction ends," or how one can confidently cast the genre of the book as either/or, becomes less clear.

The tense closing chapter of Funny Boy marks a dramatic shift in the mood of the novel, as well as its form. Unlike the chapters proceeding, the chapter is written in diary form. Tensions between Sinhalese and Tamil groups have reached a new height. Riots have broken out and entered Colombo (an allusion to Sri Lanka's "1983 Riots"). The rioters have been given the records of all Tamils that reside in Colombo (via public voter registration documents) and are being singled out and in some cases killed or beaten. Homes are being burned to the ground. It is this event that Arjie is hastily recording as he lives through it. The entries are shockingly horrific. Arjie's grandparents are killed; their car set on fire as they were trying to escape (with them still inside). Eventually Arjie's home too is set on fire by the rioters—all their property is destroyed.

The ethnic contentions building during the course of the novel have taken a physically destructive form. The national narratives of cultural contention are given public expression in this terrible event. In addition, a full awareness of the narratives that shape and position the country's ethnic groups into violent contestations has now been fully realized by Arjie in this last chapter. Symbolically the destruction of Arjie's private residence—his house—can refer metaphorically to the breakdown between the private and public spheres of national

consciousness—the breakdown of the boundaries that separate that binary. Yet, the form of the chapter as a diary provides a private space for Arjie to articulate expression.

Finally, after sustaining a great deal of trauma, Arjie's father listens to a speech given by the president of the country in hopes that it would provide a modicum of solace to what has been a devastating experience. He is shocked to find the speech contains no references to events that had just occurred in the capital—as though nothing happened. The family contemplates leaving Sri Lanka. Eventually, the family will leave Sri Lanka for Canada. It is an event that corresponds biographically to the author's own experiences of expatriation from the country. The absence of mention of the riots in the president's speech unsettles the imagined community conceived in Arjie's father's mind. To Anderson, media sources reaffirm the linkages that connect disparate people together to form a nation. By omitting the fact that a devastating catastrophe has occurred within the community, the president places the experience of those affected outside of the realm of the nation.

However, the imagined community of Sri Lanka can be revised and is composed of multiple narratives. Arjie has realized this flexibility to the imagined Sri Lankan conception by way of his own "funny" identity and his creation of a new narrative to accommodate it. He exercises what Bhabha calls the "'right to narrate' as a means of achieving [one's] own national or communal identity" (Location xx). Though Arjie leaves the country for Canada, he leaves with a troubled and multiplied sense of Sri Lanka. Thanks to the stories of Radha, Daryl, and his own "funny" status, he is loosened from the dominating narratives of national singularity.

Funny Boy demonstrates the multiplicity of national narratives and the various ways Sri Lanka is imagined from within. When this framing of the various Sri Lanka-of-the-Minds are revealed it invites one to interrogate these constructions. This interrogation can activate a site of

resistance, and in the case of Arjie, provide a new space of imagining the nation and one's place in it. This is something I believe the expatriated writer provokes: resistance to narratives by their own production from within dislocation as well as an impulse to chart out new spaces where one might not already exist for them. In addition, the story of Uncle Daryl and Lasantha Wickrematunge destabilize notions of what is "real" and "imaginary"—of what's "authentic" and "inauthentic" —and how the labeling of these as fixed is problematic. They invite one to consider the possibility of other narratives that may be suppressed, other versions of Sri Lanka that may be hidden or voices unheard. This impulse to consider disarticulated voices is the focus of the next section.

Revising History

Expatriated writers gesture towards a revision of national narratives. This is seen effectively in Funny Boy with Arjie "revising" a framing of the nation to incorporate his "funny" identity; it is seen in the story of Uncle Daryl, a story that shadows the act of many Sri Lankan journalists who have sought "revisions" to the way information was being disseminated and distorted in the country. This revisionary impulse is of course also a key component in Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family. Ondaatje re-conceptualizes a new Sri Lankan territory: from the fragments of memory entwined with his own subjectivity and personal sense of wonder. Yet in many ways the expatriated writer hints at the possibility of *other* revisions: the subalterns' history for instance.

The subaltern is a person, as Gayatri Spivak states, "without lines of social mobility," who "[has] no history and cannot speak" (83). Silent and hidden within the weaves of the national fabric, they have no means to articulate for themselves—they have no voice; theirs is, what Edward Said calls, "a narrative missing from the official story" for their history is

"necessarily in the hands of others" (vii). To try and reflect on the subaltern "other" critically has been a challenge for scholars. To "genuinely" and "thoroughly comprehen[d]" this figure requires one to "negate or at least severally bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his[/her] culture," an act that is "virtually impossible" (Janmohamed 19).

The Subaltern Studies group, led by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak and through the contributions of a wide array of scholars have made it their charge to wrest the subaltern from obscurity by attempting to rewrite aspects of histories of which the subaltern's presence was largely occluded. It will always be an incomplete charge, for access to subaltern history is limited—as such there is "frequent reference to such things as gaps, absences, lapses, ellipses" (Said vii). The scholar seeking to restore the subaltern into consideration must realize "their privilege is their loss" (Spivak 82). Through an awareness of their own privileged position as academics and "speaking for another," the Subaltern Studies group have produced useful and productive works "to articulate the hidden or suppressed accounts" of subaltern narratives: and where *presence* cannot be restored, to make—at the very least—the subaltern *absence* known (Said vii).

Sometimes the subaltern emerges within other narratives. When this occurs, it provides an interesting perspective into this haunting elusive specter. One text that invites consideration of the subaltern figure, written by Michael Ondaatje, is a novel entitled Anil's Ghost.

When first published in April 2000, initial reviews of Anil's Ghost were unfavorable (Derrickson 131). Having set his novel during an especially dark period in Sri Lanka's sociopolitical history, many critics felt the somewhat disinterested stance the novel takes on turbulent background events, seemed, as one critic remarked "irresponsible" (LeClair 31). A

review from The Economist, writes "there is a certain coldness about the book altogether…[something] too easy, tidy, and literary" ("Anil's Ghost").

To some extent I agree with the reviews: there is a distance inherent with the narrative—a certain void doesn't seem to unravel. However, this "distance" is a symptom of something very interesting the novel is trying to articulate: that is, the elusive subaltern figure. The attempt, and its failure, I argue, is productive because it forces one to confront the subaltern, or at the very least brings this often dissimulated figure into a forum for critical discussion and consideration.

The novel is a story of a young woman named Anil returning to her homeland of Sri Lanka after an absence of 15 years. Anil works for an international human rights organization as a forensic anthropologist. She has been asked to investigate reports of civilian atrocities occurring in Sri Lanka. Her arrival and investigation, although sanctioned by the Sri Lankan government, is still something of a concern for them. The government has been implicated, through resistance movements, journalists, and of course by the LTTE (a Tamil guerrilla army opposing the government), of having committed certain crimes and extrajudicial acts against its own civilians. However, until this point, there has been no concrete evidence linking the government to any misdeeds—until now.

During her investigation in Sri Lanka Anil makes a dramatic discovery. She finds among the ruins of a government-protected ancient burial ground, the anachronistic remains of a skeleton that does not have the markings of a 6th century human fossil. Forensic tests she surreptitiously conducts confirm her suspicion, and the rest of the novel is a search for the identity of this skeleton that she names "Sailor."

This quest of reconstituting the identity of Sailor, this one man murdered amongst so many in the country, is the focal point of the novel. Who was he? What did he do? And why is his

skeleton buried in a government-protected ancient burial ground? She goes to great lengths to procure his identity, including, risking her own life and scouring the country for those who can help piece together the story of Sailor. Sailor can be seen as a subaltern figure. He is unable to speak for himself and must rely on others to provide his identity.

Within that first interpellative gesture Anil makes assigning the name "Sailor" to the unidentified skeletal remains signals the moment "Sailor" takes on a new subject position. It raises questions also on what/whom "Sailor" exactly signifies. Does the marker refer to just the skeleton? Does it refer to a real person? Or does the sign "Sailor" refer to something/someone merely imagined or invented by Anil? Because the true identity of the skeleton cannot be easily established, but instead must be reconstituted through fragments and extrapolations based on forensic data and the conclusions conjectured by the scientist, identity can only be posed, never proved.

This difficulty in "excavating" the subaltern's history into the national narrative—and into significance—can be seen as metaphorically represented with the novel's involvement with forensics. The need to make informed conclusions about the history of "Sailor"—in the midst of those "gaps, absences, lapses, ellipses" —is similar to what Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak and the Subaltern Studies group's members have confronted when attempting to reestablish the subaltern perspective. The subaltern's plight has always been their erasure and/or their re-representation in the "master narratives" of history by the "elite, dominant, or hegemonic class" (Said vi). The role of the scholar or the role of the scientist is already a privileged position over the subaltern—offering a deal of control over how the subaltern is ultimately framed and represented. There is a danger however of reproducing the very conditions that have historically subjugated the subaltern. Yet, the subaltern's inability to speak—their inherent disarticulated position—causes

acts of ventriloquism on their behalf unavoidable. As such, a self-conscious acknowledgement of one's own subjectivity, and how that may figure into any re-articulation of the subaltern is something that must be acknowledged.

The influence of one's personal subjectivity as both a determining and contaminating force within efforts of re-representing subaltern history is seen throughout Anil's Ghost. One scene in particular where this is emphasized is the climactic eye-painting scene. The painting of the eyes is the final act performed before the consecration of any new Buddhist statue in Sri Lanka. It is the moment Sri Lankan Buddhists believe that a statue first takes on life, and is performed in the company of patrons during a special ceremony led by a special eye painter. In the novel, a former celebrated eye painter named Ananda is recruited to help reproduce the identity of Sailor. His charge is to sculpt and paint over a molding of the skull fragment to produce a physical likeness of Sailor—to give "life" to Sailor.

The elusiveness of Ananda, the inability—at first—of finding him and getting him to agree to perform his skill on Sailor, builds heightened hope and expectations on his ability. When Ananda is finally found, and finally agrees, the long process of the sculpting and painting continues to build onto the promise that his work will finally reveal the missing pieces to help reconstitute Sailor's identity. What results, however, is that the molding bares a striking resemblance to Ananda's recently killed wife—one of many civilian victims of the Sri Lankan civil war. In this molding Ananda is casting his wife with a peaceful expression because, "the painter cannot bear to configure death as anything but a state of peace" (Eder). The sculptor's personal life and hopeful desires, enters the reproduction of Sailor (the subaltern).

Another one of Michael Ondaatje's works, a poem entitled "The Cinnamon Peeler," provides a useful glimpse into the subaltern perspective. This poem is an important component

of the Ondaatje *oeuvre*—even given highlighted visibility amongst his works: appearing in both his famed memoir Running in the Family as an isolated chapter, and as the titled poem of his widely popular collection, The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems.

The poem reads as a glimpse into the erotic thoughts and conjured intimate encounters of a "would-be" cinnamon peeler and his wife. The speaker's identity is ambiguous at the onset of the poem. The first line of the poem, "If I were a cinnamon peeler," presumably places the entire poem within the brackets of the hypothetical. This cinnamon peeler—or someone imagining being one—engages sexually with his spouse, leaving a trace of himself on her person: wherever she is, wherever she goes, she cannot escape the tangling spiced "scent" of her husband. These smells too are erotically charged, emanating from intimate locations, with vaporous grips and delicate, sensual caresses: "Your breasts and shoulders would reek / you could never walk through markets / without the profession of my fingers / floating over you" (5-8).

While the poem has generated some scholarly discussion from a variety of critical focus-points, a postcolonial critical interpretation with emphasis on the subaltern has not been fully explored. Such an interpretation can offer an interesting alternative perspective into this poem, and can help reveal the plight of the subaltern within the power structures of hegemonic master narrative(s).

As evident through the poem, the smell of the cinnamon peeler holds a certain potent bearing: a wafting redolence with a possessive vitality. It is able to linger indelibly on his wife, "floating over" her, where even "The blind would / stumble certain of whom they approached" (8-9). The smell also acts to brand his wife and mark ownership of her body: "You will be known among strangers / as the cinnamon peeler's wife" (17-18). It flaunts a certain colonial

swagger—a territorial impetus. The body of the cinnamon peeler's wife becomes a territory to conquer, own and brand.

However, there is something unsettling about linking the cinnamon peeler with the bridles of colonial power. While the poem certainly supports, and perhaps invites, us to grant him this power, there are elements of the poem that undermine this interpretation.

To start, the cinnamon peeler is a strangely disarticulated figure in the poem. While the poem bears his name, this cinnamon peeler (or the person masquerading as one) remains fixed, musing in the background. The only foregrounded figure is his wife. Though he is the "speaker" in the poem, the act of speaking does not occur by him. The wife of course, in the last line, speaks the only voiced words of the poem, when she proclaims, "I am the cinnamon / peeler's wife. Smell me" (45-46).

The only part of the cinnamon peeler's identity available to the external world is in the form of his "scent." It is a disembodied and intangible presence. Further, the cinnamon peeler's presumed power over his wife can be read in the antithesis: the cinnamon peeler lives only through his wife. It is she that gives life to her husband—possesses her husband—and does so by being host to his "presence." He lives vicariously through her. She can be considered the one with agency over his existence: decides where he travels, whom he meets, and where he cannot go.

In addition, in the same way that loud cries for help, waving hands, or smoke screens are used to arouse attention, the sexual undercurrent in the poem functions, I argue, as a type of distress beacon. Lines like, "I would ride your bed / and leave the yellow bark dust / on your pillow," or the evocative mediations on imitate regions of the body, the visceral eagerness, the "touching," the body, desire, flesh, and feeling, seem to almost lurch out of the poem and grab

the reader (2-4). The cinnamon peeler, with limited expression to the external world—a quintessence confined to a scent—can be read as desperately trying to reach out and feel and to throw around his physicalness in a world that does not see him, or feel him—one that can only smell his subalternity.

But the opening lines of the poem need to be addressed. The masquerade, the role-play, the ambiguousness of the speaker's identity needs to be confronted. Who is this person if not a cinnamon peeler? By a simple act, an act of grammar—the wielding of the copula—the subject has been subsumed: "If I were a Cinnamon Peeler" (1). The real subject position of the cinnamon peeler has been wrenched away from its original, and the mimicry the "speaking-for" begins. By revealing in the first three words of the poem the copula that eviscerates the cinnamon peeler, the speaker is justly revealing the moment that the cinnamon peeler's identity disappears. The cinnamon peeler certainly never existed in the poem, nor could have ever been seen. He is always external from it, always a subaltern that cannot speak. And the speaker—speaking for the cinnamon peeler—is telling the cinnamon peeler's story. It is a story of the subaltern: a story that cannot be spoken of by the subaltern itself. It is one that must always be told for them: by one with the privilege and the means to do so.

These examples from Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost and his poem "Cinnamon Peeler," reaffirm the ultimate disarticulation of the subaltern. The subaltern's identity is always constructed within a dominant and determining system of representation (Morton 66-67). Like Sailor, or the cinnamon peeler, the subaltern is re-presented as a pointer to an irretrievable consciousness" (Spivak 82). But this "irretrievability," the attempt and failure of wresting the subaltern into full view is still useful. As Spivak suggests, "what the work *cannot* say becomes important" (82). The gesture of recovery reaffirms the notions discussed earlier: that a conception of the nation is

fluid and flexible. The historical terrain that fixes a conception of the country is not fixed; it can shift and be re-imagined. In addition, there will always be voids and opportunities for new perspectives—there is always a need for revisions.

Although the subaltern cannot speak, reading closely between the texts, observing the trailing watermarks of their influence, the hidden footprints of their existence, restores a piece of their contribution and significance to the narratives of history. However, there are some expatriates living on the thresholds of marginality who vehemently refuse to let dislocation curtail vocal expression. Their voices are not just heard, they resound and echo; their movements pulse with energy; they transform dislocation into a site of vibrant syncretic possibility. The Sri Lankan hip-hop artist known as M.I.A. is one of them.

The Sights, Sounds and Rhythm of Dislocation

In contrast to the silence of the subaltern is the rhythmical beats and sonorous presence of the hip-hop artist Mathangi "Maya" Arulpragasam, or as she is more popularly known, M.I.A. M.I.A. is an expatriated Sri Lankan lauded around the globe for her music. Her album Arular and the widely successful Kala, alongside her visual performances, have won her countless doting fans and accolades including two Grammy awards and one Academy Award nomination. In 2009 Time Magazine included her in their "Time 100 List of 'World's Most Influential People'" (Jonze). Her music is even showcased in the soundtrack for some major motion pictures including Slumdog Millionaire, Pineapple Express, and War ("Maya"). Embedded in her art are forms of resistance, synthesis, and complex performativity. Together, they provide expressions closely aligned to a main concern of hers: the conditions of ethnic oppression that have fractured

(and continue to fracture) nations around the globe—including the country she is close to, Sri Lanka.

Unlike Selvadurai and Ondaatje, M.I.A was not born in Sri Lanka. She was born in London from Tamil parents and later moved back to Sri Lanka at the age of six. Her father's political affiliations with a group critical of the Sri Lankan government made him *persona non grata* in the eyes of many in the country. Out of safety for his wife and children, M.I.A.'s father would force the family to relocate without him to several different countries, arriving eventually to England as refugees.

This sense of exile, of being a refugee with severed ties to her homeland, is featured heavily in M.I.A's works. She embraces the interpellative marker of "refugee" and reverses its margined position from one of disarticulation to one of peremptory expression. Her music resounds from what Bhabba might call the "borderline," a space to which she mediates and can "translate the differences between [race] into a kind of solidarity" (Location 244)**.** This "kind of solidarity" produced in her art first seeks to dismantle that which fissures and contests it; it is in fact a "resistance" to stereotypes and oppressive ideologies that must be engaged to produce solidarity.

Among the stereotypes M.I.A. is labeled with is that of being a "terrorist" (Hiatt 22). This "terrorist" labeling is partly due to her vocal political stance to minority oppressions in Sri Lanka—one critical of the government—as well as her stance generally featured through her art: supportive of "armed uprisings of the worlds oppressed" (Hiatt 22). But rather than try to defend her way against stereotypes, M.I.A performs these very stereotypes—with flair. In one interview, she jokingly self-identifies, "I'm a Third World refugee terrorist" (Hiatt 22). By assuming

stereotypes in this manner, she is able to subvert them as well as launch from them a site of resistance and possibility.

Her subversion of stereotypes is interestingly performed in a song entitled "Paper Planes." The refrain of the song reads "All I wanna do is /And take your money" (17-18). This refrain is punctuated (after the word "is") by a background track of multiple loud gunshots and (after the word "take") by the chime of a cash register door slamming shut. The identity of the singer can be thought of as a "foreigner" or "refugee" by the line, "If you catch me at the border I got visas in my name" (2). The background noises of the gunshots and the cash register inscribe suggestions of violence being perpetrated by the foreigner. The song seems to accept and reproduce these negative stereotypes.

However, the song is deeply satirical. Yet this satire is not just hidden: it cannot be seen at all from just listening to the song. One must witness the song performed visually to discover its ironic intentions. The music video of the song features M.I.A. as a simple street vendor selling hot grinders in an urban neighborhood. The gunshots are just background sounds, with clips of M.I.A. making exaggerated gun wielding hand pantomimes. The chime of the cash register is the closing of a transaction: the selling of a sandwich, the exchange of a few dollars. The hand pantomimes and the menacing sardonic look that M.I.A. presents serves to cast criticism on stereotypes; it posits them as imaginary—an extrapolation of the mind. Also, this creative way of presenting a song that can be *heard* one way, *seen* another, subtly argues the existence of multiple angles that need to be considered prior to the circumscription of labels. It might also suggest that at times, though only one perspective might be available (the audio for instance), one must be cautious of prescriptive thinking—or should at least hold to the possibility that a different angle may exist.

M.I.A. showcases what Frantz Fanon might call her "fact of difference." Bill Ashcroft, citing Fanon, suggests "self-consciousness of the 'fact' or the visible emblems of difference can drive the 'resistance' to undo stereotyping" (289). The "visible emblems" of MIA's difference, her self-identifying status as a refugee, is pronounced in her art in many ways. Her clothing/costumes that dress her music videos and on-stage performances are often the tattered hand-me-downs and patched T-shirts of indigence. Her garb is notably un-Sri Lankan. She rarely adorns herself in saris or sarongs. Instead we often see Western "rags"—a T-Shirt with a worn USA emblem, a man's old robe, or an outfit a decade out of fashion. They are borrowed vestments provoking images of relief efforts, or more plainly, the "uniform" of the refugee. But using these "rags" she modifies them. She makes them further unique with intricate cuts and alterations—pairing the un-matching, wearing the unthinkable, festooning swatches of color that draw striking attention. She transforms all this into a fashion, a new style—even an apparel line: where one can "buy" or "purchase" this look. Her commodifying and performance of "refugee" has repositioned the "refugee" marker from a site of ostensible disarticulation, to one of synthesis and possibility.

In addition, her use of "Western" clothing as the raw material of her synthesis insinuates a rather interesting site for her resistance. She produces from "borrowed codes." Marvin Carlson an essay entitled "Resistance Performance" speaks about the position of the resistance performer speaking from within the dominant social arena, suggesting there is "no 'outside' from which to operate":

> unable to move outside the operations of performance (or representation), and thus inevitably involved in its codes and reception assumptions, the contemporary performer seeking to resist, challenge, or even subvert these codes and assumptions must find some way of doing this 'from within' (309).

For M.I.A. the strategy she employs is this creation of a space for the refugee, "from within." It is a space strung together from a *pastiche* of borrowed codes and symbols to launch a resistance as well as solidarity.

The body and its live active movement in dance in M.I.A.'s performance create an emphatic presence to the refugee. In the music video "Galang" the constant dance movements of M.I.A. in the foreground is one that demands the gaze of the spectator. The video features the performer mostly by herself and dancing while various warlike images splash behind her: a picture of dynamite exploding, tanks, jets, fire and a variety of other incendiaries. The refugee, though marginalized, in borrowed garments, and a borrowed language, makes its voice overt and flaunts the presence of the body. This itself is an act of resistance to the ideology of "minority" that may presuppose irrelevance.

In addition, the body in movement, dance, as Helen Gilbert suggests, "offers a site of potential resistance to hegemonic discourses through its representation of the body on stage as a moving subject that actually looks back at its spectator" (305). While the performer is constantly dancing, her eyes remain fixed at the spectator. Rather than be a passive recipient of the gaze of the spectator, this "looking back" forces more than just an acknowledgement of *presence*, it marks the *spectator* the subject of the performer's gaze as well. This unsettles the power structures delineating the markers of spectator and performer, subject and object. As Bill Ashcroft states in regards to body and performance, "the oral and the performance is predicated upon the idea of an exchange in which those engaged are physically present to one another" (289). The visual "text" of M.I.A., unlike a written text, requires both parties to acknowledge each other's presence.

M.I.A. produces this dialectic of "refugee" with language as well. The lyrics that accompany, complement, and give voice to her music are unusual. They cross boarders and domains of grammar and speech. They are an eclectic cockney mix of Tamil and English, with accents that seem to sound both British and Australian. Her words at times seem disjoint and fragmented—searching for meaning, landing on some understanding, and then escaping. They produce and perform a cumulative peripatetic effect of the "otherworldly" and misunderstanding. In all, they produce a new language of the refugee: one who, although speaks the vocabulary of a borrowed *langue*, must still ardently strive to be heard and understood.

This new language of the refugee can be heard in the song from the album Arular called "Bucky Done Gun." Only a few lines, including the opening, are comprehendible: "London / Quieten down I need to make sound / New York / Quieten down I need to make a sound" (1-4). Interestingly, the words don't suggest needing to "say" anything, but rather, the "need to make a sound"—a need to be heard, not necessarily understood. What then follows these lines is a chaotic tangle of language. The refrain of the song reads, "What you want? / Bucky done gun / What you want now? / Fire done burn" (17-20). Tracing meaning in the lyrics guided by rules of English grammar would be a stumbling block towards comprehension. Instead, implied is the need to put away imposing rules requiring the language to adhere. The refugee, being displaced and using borrowed symbols, must be permitted a unique space of expression—from dislocation to a space of belonging.

Like Ondaatje and Selvadurai, M.I.A., working from the seemingly disadvantaged position of the expatriate, reveals the ironic fecundity and overall possibility that such a perspective affords. She affirms what Rushdie suggests in "Imaginary Homelands," that the "broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed" (11).

Conclusion

On the 19th of May 2009 the Sri Lankan government declared that the civil war, one that had plagued the country for over 26 years, was finally over. The disbanding of the LTTE, after the death of their leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, effectively removed the last remaining opponent to the Sri Lankan government. To many, this new development is a welcome change signaling an opportunity for the nation to begin the rebuilding process. Others however, remain skeptical that hostilities in Sri Lanka have actually ceased or that ethnic divisiveness and minority oppression that plagues the country has improved. The recent reelection of the Sinhalese Prime Minister Rajapaksa, less than a year after the end-of-war declaration, was mired in alleged election fraud, casting a pall over his victory and the conditions of equality in the nation. The Roman Catholic Archbishop, Oswald Gomis writes the following in response to the end of war in Sri Lanka:

> The war is not ended. The war would end only on the day that we grow in nationhood realizing that we are all one people in one country with equal right. We have to realize the fact that we are a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural community. As such we are now left with the great task of nation-building. (Gomis)

Despite the cautionary tone in the Archbishop's comments, they hold a great deal of promise. Recognition that the nation is indeed, as he writes, "multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural," requires a construction of the nation reflecting a plurality of angles. Since perceptions of the country are framed in the mind, as Benedict Anderson suggests, different "imagined" conceptions of the country must be permitted.

Of course, the work of rebuilding is not yet complete in Sri Lanka. According to one estimate, there are approximately 300,000 Tamils still displaced within the country. The number of those expatriated is greater still.

The expatriated angle explored in this thesis is just one of many possible angles. I decided to focus on the expatriate for three key reasons. Firstly, I believe the expatriate's

dislocated position, and the charges of inauthenticity depriving their work from serious regard, provide a useful point of departure to understanding the ways the nation is conceived of in the mind. Secondly, the expatriate provokes a useful interrogation of the multiplicity of national narratives that often constrict ways of thinking of oneself in relation to one's country and homeland. And lastly, their location and productivity in the interstices between borders and belonging reveal the possibility for new ways of thinking: they open a dialogue for "revisions" to the way Sri Lanka can be apprehended and how ostensible dislocation can be a site for renewed creativity.

Michael Ondaatje, in his portrait of Sri Lanka in Running in the Family, reveals the palimpsestic and imaginary frontier of the nation. The nation, as Benedict Anderson and Bhabha suggest, is a conception framed in the mind. It is a fluid conception comprised of various cultural and social artifacts: personal subjectivity, bias, language, oral and written tradition. These disparate elements coalesce to frame visions of the nation—an imagined community. This fragmentary quality of nationhood is something Ondaatje captures poignantly in Running in the Family. Performed through the organic structure of the memoir, Ondaatje imagines a conception of Sri Lanka and his family history built upon fragments of memory, research, myth, gossip and rumor. Such a fractured portrait of the nation reproduces the largely provisional and complex way the nation is envisaged in the mind; it is like a "broken glass" as Rushdie suggests:

> Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved" (12)

Ultimately, Ondaatje provokes the consideration of a Sri Lanka that is more fluid and flexible—one open to *revisions*.

In the bildungsroman Funny Boy, Selvadurai reveals the way dominant narratives of the nation are reproduced and inscribed in the individual. In the novel, Arjie's "funniness," immediately position him as "other" in the eyes of his family—the dominant narratives of Sri Lanka do not recognize nor condone his "funniness." However, rather than allow his identity to be defined by these narratives, he forms new ones. He demonstrates that a nation is composed of a multiplicity of imagined narratives reproduced by cultural and social discursive forces. This act of "revision" that Arjie is able to perform, suggest the possibility of overcoming other narratives that have loomed over the country, particularly those inciting violence and hatred between ethnicities, as seen in the chapter "Aunt Radha."

The story of Uncle Daryl, a chapter within Funny Boy, provokes the consideration for revisions to assumed conceptions of the nation, as well as connects and unsettles the notions "imaginary" and "real." The fictional story of Daryl, paralleled with the nonfictional account of Lasantha Wickrematunge, show how the national construction of the nation can have multiple and contradictory perceptions. The two journalists, interrogating the reality of civilian oppression and state acts of terror in Sri Lanka, are killed. The suppression of their versions of the "truth" troubles the delineations of "imaginary" and "real" and causes an unsettling of various binaries: authenticity/inauthenticity, fiction/nonfiction. The stories provoke revisions and reconsideration to how the nation is conceived.

The revisionary impulse provoked by Selvadurai's Funny Boy as well as Ondaatje's Running in the Family is further explored in a section devoted to the "subaltern." The subaltern figure and their omissions from the official record of history are explored in this section. The subaltern's emergence in the works of Ondaatje's novel Anil's Ghost and his poem "Cinnamon Peeler" provide a useful glimpse into the way this disarticulated figure's identity can only be re-

presented—true reconstitution of their identity is out of reach. However, the gesture towards the subaltern's (hidden) existence reaffirms that the nation is a fluid conception—always open to new perspectives.

The final section, which explores the art of M.IA., reveals the productive potential of the expatriate even within a space of ostensible dislocation. Using "borrowed codes" and launching from her marker as "refugee" she creates new, rich and eclectic rhythm—sights and sounds—articulating an original form of expression. The syncretic possibilities demonstrated by the creative works of M.I.A. confirm Rushdie's belief in the boundless potential of the expatriate by "pushing the work to the limits of what it is possible to think" (15).

By examining just these few English-language, expatriated expressions of Sri Lanka, we can see how vast this conversation about nation and identity can be. "To study the nation," Bhabha writes, "through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself" (Nation 3). The expatriate's works explored in this thesis confirm Bhabha's assertion that the nation is deeply ambivalent, in constant flux, multiple, where "meanings may be partial because they are *in media res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" (Nation 3). The ambivalent territory of "Sri Lanka" within each expatriated individual can and does yield multiple, shifting versions of the nation that continually question notions such as "nation," "self," "home," "belonging," "inauthenticity," and "subjectivity." The expatriate raises these questions, while providing new angles, new perspectives, new ways of seeing and interacting, to the nation and the world around us.

Works Cited

Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. New York: Verso, 2006.

"Anil's Ghost, by Michael Ondaatje." Rev. of Anil's Ghost. The Economist 17 June 2000: 14.

Ashcroft, Bill. "The Body and Performance." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, 2006. 18-22.

Bhabha, Homi K. Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 2004.

---. Nation and Narration. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Brennan, Timothy. "The National Longing for Form." Nation and Narration. New York: Routledge, 1990.

David, Rocio. "Imaginary Homelands Revisited in Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family." English Studies. 3 (1996): 266-274.

Derrickson, Teresa. "Will the 'Un-truth' Set You Free? A Critical Look at Global Human Rights Discourse in Michael Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost." Literature Interpretation Theory. 15 (Apr-June): 131-52.

Eder, Richard. "A House Divided." Rev. of Anil's Ghost. The New York Times 12 May 2000. The New York Times. Web. 22 Apr. 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/05/14/reviews/000514.14ederlt.html>.

Gilbert, Helen. "Dance, Movement and Resistance Politics." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, 2006. 18-22.

Girton, Josh. "Michael Ondaatje." Michael Ondaatje. Emory University, Fall 2007. Web. 05 Apr. 2010. <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Ondaat.html>.

Gomis, Oswald. Sri Lanka News | Defence.lk. Web. 22 Apr. 2010. <http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20090518_15>.

Heble, Ajay. "'Rumours of Topography': The Cultural Politics of Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family." Essays on Canadian Writing. 53 (Summer 1994): 186-203.

Hiatt, Brian. "M.I.A. goes global." Rolling Stone. 1033 (August 2007): 22.

Huggan, Graham. "Exoticism and Ethnicity in Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family." Essays on Canadian Writing. 57 (Winter 1995): 116-27.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Interview with Michael Ondaatje." Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicutural Fictions. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990. 201.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory." The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, 2006. 18-22.

Jayawickrama, Sharanya. "At Home in the Nation? Negotiating Identity in Shyam Selvadurai's Funny Boy." The Journal of Commonwealth Literature (2005):123-139.

Jonze, Spike. "M.I.A. The 2009 TIME 100." TIME Magazine. Web. 20 Apr. 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1894410_1893836_1894427,00.html>.

Kanaganayakan, Chelva. "A Trick with a Glass: Michael Ondaatje's South Asian Connection." Canadian Literature. 132 (Spring, 1992): 33-41.

LeClair, Tom. ''The Sri Lankan Patients.'' Rev. of Anil's Ghost, by Michael Ondaatje. The Nation. 19 (June 2000): 31.

Lehman, Daniel. Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction Over the Edge. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1997.

"Maya Arulpragasam." The Internet Movie Database (IMDb). Web. 20 Apr. 2010. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1756665/>.

M.I.A. "Paper Planes." Kala. Santa Monica: Interscope Records, 2007.

---. "Bucky Done Gun." Arular. Santa Monica: Interscope Records, 2005.

---. "Galang." Arular. Santa Monica: Interscope Records, 2005.

Morton, Stephen. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. London: Routledge, 2003.

Ondaatje, Michael. Anil's Ghost. New York: Vintage, 2001.

---. The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poem. New York: Vintage International, 1997.

---. Running in the Family. New York: Vintage International, 1993.

Said, Edward. Foreword. Selected Subaltern Studies. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Salgado, Minoli. Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Salman, Rushdie. Imaginary Homelands. New York: Penguin, 1992.

Selvadurai, Shyam. Funny Boy. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

---. Story-Wallah: Short Fiction from South Asian Writers. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005.

---. Swimming in the Monsoon Sea. New York: Tundra Books, 2007.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

Smith, Donald E. "Religion, Politics, and the Myth of Reconquest." Modern Sri Lanka: A Society in Transition. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1979.

Thottam, Jyoti. "President Rajapaksaa Interview with TIME Magazine." The Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka. Web. 20 Apr. 2010.

Wickrematunge, Lasantha. "And Then They Came For Me." The Sunday Leader Online. The Sunday Leader. Web. 20 Apr. 2010. <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/archive/20090111/editorial-.htm>.