

# Diasporic Cross-Currents in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*

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IN HIS REVIEW of *Anil's Ghost*, Todd Hoffmann describes Michael Ondaatje's novel as a "mystery of identity" (449). Similarly, Aritha van Herk identifies "fear, unpredictability, secrecy, [and] loss" (44) as the central features of the novel and its female protagonist. *Anil's Ghost*, van Herk argues, presents its readers with a "motiveless world" of terror in which "no identity is reliable, no theory waterproof" (45). Ondaatje's novel tells the story of Anil Tessera, a Sri Lankan expatriate and forensic anthropologist working for a UN-affiliated human rights organization. Haunted by a strong sense of personal and cultural dislocation, Anil takes up an assignment in Sri Lanka, where she teams up with a local archeologist, Sarath Diyasena, to uncover evidence of the Sri Lankan government's violations of human rights during the country's period of acute civil war. Yet, by the end of the novel, Anil has lost the evidence that could have indicted the government and is forced to leave the country, carrying with her a feeling of guilt for her unwitting complicity in Sarath's death. On one hand, Anil certainly embodies an ethical (albeit rather schematic) critique of the failure of global justice. On the other, her character stages diaspora, in Vijay Mishra terms, as the "normative" and "exemplary . . . condition of late modernity" ("Diasporic" 441) — a condition usually associated with the figure of the nomad rather than the diasporic subject — and thus raises questions about the novel's regulatory politics of diasporic identity.

In contrast, Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* represents the formation of diasporic identities as an empowering process shaped by multiple changes on the local level rather than by transnational mobility. Set in a fictive seaside town in Tamil Nadu, southern India, Rau Badami's novel narrates the story of a genteel but impoverished Brahmin family. In the midst of globally induced environmental catastrophes and local processes of social disintegration, Sripathi Rao, the father of the family and the novel's

protagonist, has to cope with the death of his estranged daughter, Maya, and the arrival of his Canadian granddaughter, Nandana. Interestingly, the novel is not primarily concerned with Maya, who used to live with her family in Vancouver and is perhaps the novel's most conventional diasporic subject. Instead, it examines how Sripathi's multiple displacements and re-rootings, and Nandana's reversed journey to the Old World, mediate diaspora through the characters' everyday life experiences and locally defined events. In the novel, however, the local neither equals antimodernist traditionalism nor provides a source of romantic liberation ideologies. Rather, it designates, in Arif Dirlik's words, a critical "site for the working out of the most fundamental contradictions of the age" of global capitalism (23). As such, the novel's renderings of the local facilitate competing readings of diaspora as alternative configurations of social space and human connections.

This paper, then, argues that *Anil's Ghost* and *The Hero's Walk* advance conceptual cross-fertilizations between Canadian literature and diaspora studies and intervene into current discourses of diaspora. To this end, my analysis of these novels employs a supplementary and comparative reading strategy. The former avoids a mimetic reading practice of literary and non-literary texts and, instead, theorizes diaspora through the dissonances that might emerge through such a practice. The latter, a comparative reading practice, yields two specific conceptual and historically situated genealogies of diaspora. In particular, while Ondaatje's novel envisions diaspora in largely ahistorical terms as a condition of Anil's nomadic identity, cultural relativism, and political failure, Rau Badami's novel fashions patterns of diasporic identification — rather than identity — around moments of stillness and disruption that generate new forms of communal and individual autonomy. Thus, to discern the particular cultural and political dynamics of diaspora, it is necessary not only to emphasize the dialectical relationship between diasporic and non-diasporic people, but also to distinguish between forced diasporas, flexible transnational diasporas, and what I call intra-national diasporas. As my reading of *The Hero's Walk* suggests, the latter term refers to a form of diasporic identity that is not necessarily bound to transnational border crossings. Instead, it thematizes the ways in which the effects of environmental and economic global restructuring, along with the disintegration of received local forms of national and cultural identification, transform the micro spaces of social life. These changes frequently affect both the dislocation of given identities and the formation of new personal and political affiliations. Divided into two parts, then, my paper first discusses diaspora as a contested and, at times, disempowering category

of cultural knowledge production and, second, investigates diaspora's potential to act as a political practice able to generate public spaces of political dissent and agency.

### Locations of Diaspora

Diaspora and diaspora writing denote highly contradictory and contested categories through which to make and unmake cultural and national identities. Diasporas can be at once cosmopolitan and particularist, transnational and nationalist, interventive and parochial, depending on their position within their new national home, their communal affiliation with their ancestral homeland, and their internal differences of class, gender, and race. Despite their various differences among and within each other, historically diasporas have been distinguished into old and new diasporas. While the former term refers to the massive dislocation and dispersal of people through slavery, imperialism, and indentureship, the latter denotes intersecting communities of migrants and refugees and their descendants or what Mishra calls the "diaspora of late capital ... whose overriding characteristic is one of 'mobility'" ("Diasporic" 422).<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, we need to note that mobility, as such theorists as Gayatri Spivak and Pheng Cheah aver, must be considered as the privilege of diaspora that makes the concept complicit with both premature anti-localist attitudes towards the nation-state and the demands of a global, deregulated economy.

Another term scholars of diaspora recognize as a distinctive marker of diaspora is the "homeland" — sacred or imaginary — and its related discourses of an original trauma, a return movement, and a common fate and history.<sup>2</sup> For example, in the context of Canadian literary criticism, Victor Ramraj explains that diasporic writings "are invariably concerned with the individual's community's attachment to the centrifugal homeland" (216). Although Ramraj aptly reminds us of the symbolic rather than literal significance of the homeland, he nevertheless locates the idea of the homeland at the centre of a communally and individually defined diasporic consciousness. Being perpetually unmoored and in a state of transition, "diasporans," Ramraj argues, along with anthropologist Victor Turner, are "liminal *persona[e]*" (216). Like Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, Ramraj sees home as a discursively constructed category of diasporic writing and cultural belonging. Yet, his emphasis on the "centrifugal" effects of the homeland recalls the nephew's search for his elusive Uncle Melech in A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*, the allegorical figure of both the history of the Jewish diaspora

and a perpetually postponed Jewish homeland (rather than Zionist nation-state).<sup>3</sup> My point here is not that the gaze back or towards an ancestral homeland tends to generate, as Mishra observes, “racial absolutism” (“Diasporic” 424), but that, in critical discourses of diaspora, it can also act as a foundationalist narrative of diasporic identity. Such an understanding of the idea of the homeland risks foregoing the task of interrogating the totalizing effects of diaspora’s dominant identity markers, even if these markers are instrumental to the “ideological work of self-consolidation” (the phrase is Keya Ganguly’s).<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it is crucial to examine how and to what effect *Anil’s Ghost* challenges and/or reinforces such dominant ap-purtenances of diaspora as the ancestral homeland and global mobility.

In Ondaatje’s novel, a central location of diaspora becomes legible at the precise moment when Anil unexpectedly disappears from the narrative. Her unexplained exit from the novel raises questions as to what extent her presence in Sri Lanka will shape her life once she returns to the United States. How much would the memory of Sarath, the Sri Lankan anthropologist teamed up with Anil to identify the skeleton of a political murder victim, and Gamini, Sarath’s brother, become a part of her life “back in the adopted country of her choice” (285)? Will her visit to Sri Lanka have the same tragic effects on her life as it had on Sarath’s? Certainly not. After all, Sarath cannot escape his torturers and killers, while Anil is able to flee from Sri Lanka’s bloody theatre of war. In fact, the privilege of her mobility marks her as a cosmopolitan traveller in the post-national world of what Arjun Appadurai calls the “global modern” (21). Her absence stands as a reminder of the “American or the Englishman,” who, as Gamini bitterly remarks, “gets on a plane and leaves [at the end of the movie]. ... He is going home. ... That’s enough reality for the West. It’s probably the history of the last two hundred years of Western political writing. Go home. Write a book. Hit the circuit” (285-86). The sarcasm of Gamini’s words clearly speaks to the hypocritical attitude with which the West frequently denies its complicit and often instrumental role in civil conflicts in the so-called “Third World.” But his words also remind us that such privileged diasporic positions as Anil’s are easily harnessed to the economic and ideological demands of the global marketplace and dominant identity politics.

Taking a similar critical perspective, Barbara Godard’s essay “Notes from the Cultural Field: Canadian Literature from Identity to Hybridity” examines the ways in which contemporary global transformations have reshaped the dominant discourses of identity in Canadian literature and cultural theory. Godard suggests that although the geographical “impera-

tive in Canadian literature discourses” persists, the “discursive constitution of space” is no longer performed within the boundaries of the Canadian nation-state (211). Instead, through their multiple national investments and subject-positions writers such as, for example, Dionne Brand, Nino Ricci, Rohinton Mistry, and Michael Ondaatje produce cross-cultural social imaginaries. To Godard, who considers multiculturalism a reactionary rather than liberating force of the Canadian nation-state, this by-no-means new movement from a nationally to a transnationally defined notion of cultural identity reflects the extent to which Canadian literature caters to the economic politics of global capitalism. “‘Culture,’” she argues, has become an “autonomous and self-regulating force” and acts “as a counterforce to democracy within an all-encompassing ‘economy’ to whose ends it is subordinate” (211). Like Ondaatje’s *Gamini*, Godard alerts us to the marketability and profitability of diasporic concepts of identity in the global trade of cultures.<sup>5</sup>

While Godard’s critique is timely, her tendency to subordinate literature to the economically polarizing and culturally homogenizing effects of global capitalism risks depriving literature of its potentially interventive power. Similar to other critics who adhere to the homogenization thesis of globalization,<sup>6</sup> Godard seems too quick to abandon the possibility of reading diasporic texts for the ways in which they, in Smaro Kamboureli’s words, mediate “between various realities” (ix) and imagine global citizenship as a commitment to political dissent and economic justice. Furthermore, Godard’s tendency to use the terms diaspora, nomadism, and cultural hybridity interchangeably underscores the epistemological slippages between these concepts. It also invites us to redefine our critical vocabulary in ways that both avoid reducing “diaspora” to an academic fad and foreground the theoretical purchase these terms have on their own. Notwithstanding, then, the contested status and terminological proximity of the terms diaspora, nomadism, and cultural hybridity, a preliminary — and admittedly simplified — distinction between them helps to clarify my reading of diaspora in Ondaatje’s text.

Although all three of these terms function as metaphors for multiple and heterogeneous forms of belonging, each of them has a specific genealogy and tends to politicize identity formation to different degrees. Grounded in the eighteenth-century rhetoric of race and the practice of scientific racism and later adopted as a biological metaphor employed to destabilize founding narratives of cultural originality and racial purity, the term cultural hybridity evokes a plethora of contradictory meanings. One of the most influential and controversial articulations of cultural hybridity

is Homi Bhabha's understanding of the term. In his early work, Bhabha conceptualizes hybridity as a strategy employed to subvert colonial authority through the play of cultural difference, ambiguity, and mimicry. As many theorists have convincingly argued, Bhabha's notion of hybridity lacks a material and historically specific grounding, a theory of anticolonial resistance, and a socially viable account of postcolonial agency.<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, cultural hybridity has been rightly theorized as a hegemonic concept of identity management that supports the expansion of global capital. For capital not only accommodates but thrives on cultural difference and multiculturalism, with which hybridity is frequently associated. As Stuart Hall (1993), Ajiz Ahmad (1992), and, more recently, E. San Juan, Jr. (1998) have persistently argued, "capital ethnicizes peoples to promote labor segmentation[, resulting in] hybridity and other differential phenomena" (San Juan, Jr. 6). At the same time, I feel reluctant to abandon the culturally empowering aspects of hybridity, namely the concept's ability to question the legitimacy and, in Dionne Brand's words, the "romance of origins" (*Land* 35). In fact, Bhabha's more recent work rethinks cultural hybridity in ways that account for earlier objections to the concept and intervene into unequal power relations. "The concept of hybridity," Bhabha explains, "describe[s] the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity." "Hybrid strategy," he argues, "opens up a space of negotiation where power is *unequal* but its articulation may be *equivocal* ... Hybrid agencies deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community" and "versions of historic memory" ("Culture's" 34). In this context, cultural hybridity serves to (de)construct cultural authority, build communities, and produce memory in the midst of particular investments of power and political localities. Thus, cultural hybridity functions as both a conceptual tool through which to interrogate the constitution of diasporic belongings and a discursive reading practice through which to examine the structure of colonial desire that underlies the making of national and diasporic imaginaries.<sup>8</sup> It is in the latter sense that the notion of cultural hybridity overlaps with my reading of diaspora in Rau Badami's novel as a concept of identity that is independent of transnational mobility.

Yet, with its alleged "antilocalist" bias (Cheah 302), cultural hybridity frequently conjures a triumphalist rhetoric of postnationalism and evokes a form of cultural nomadism. If cultural hybridity, as I have discussed it, is anchored in a critique of both colonial modes of representation and the imperial legacies of Western modernity, the concept of cultural nomadism is encumbered with modernist and orientalist tropes

of the desert and the nomad. In her astute study of transnational forms of identity formation, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Caren Kaplan convincingly argues that the metaphor of the nomad belongs to those “tropes that continue to construct colonial spaces in postmodern, poststructuralist theories” (65). She observes that “from T.E. Lawrence to David Lean,” and I would add Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, “the philosophical/literary trek across the desert leads to a celebration of the figure of the nomad — the one who can track a path through a seemingly illogical space without succumbing to the nation-state,” while the “desert symbolizes the site of critical and individual emancipation in Euro-American modernity” (66). In this context, the figure of the nomad emerges outside cultural particulars but, instead, represents a radical form of displacement that is intrinsic to modernity’s experience of dislocation, loss, and uncertainty.

More frequently, however, the metaphor of the nomad serves as a dominant referent in Deleuze and Guattari’s postmodern discourses of displacement and cultural identity. In particular, and perhaps most problematically, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize the nomadic subject as a rhizomatic and deterritorialized subject. The former suggests an assemblage of infinitely combined identity fragments, which are posited in equal relation to one another and emphasize movements rather than bodies as the central sites of identity formation. The rhizome signals a volatile form of identity that lacks memory, location, and history. Furthermore, as a deterritorialized subject, the figure of the nomad, Kaplan suggests, participates in “a utopian discourse of letting go of privileged identities and practices” and must “emulat[e] the ways and modes of modernity’s ‘others’” (88). The figure of the nomad, then, is the subject of high modernism, for it seeks redemption through modernity’s colonial disjunctures, finds originality in a dialectic of cultural and spatial absolutes, and is able to choose language experimentation (i.e., “becoming minor” in the Deleuzian sense) over the historical and material realities of the global migrant, while conveniently forgetting that deterritorialization is always “reterritorialization, an increase in territory, an imperialization” (Kaplan 89). The high modernist and postmodern configuration of the nomad in discourses of cultural difference is, at least in my mind, diametrically opposed to the critique of Western modernity and the reorganization of social and cultural space undertaken by current concepts of diaspora.

As a mode of cultural critique, diaspora helps to formulate a “new set of questions” (Brydon, “It’s Time” 14) about the relationship between the Canadian nation-state and its constitutive communities. For example,

“how,” Diana Brydon asks, “can [diaspora] help us to rethink and reenact local and global belongings” (23)? In a recent article, Brydon insists that one way of approaching the question productively consists in “wrenching [the term diaspora] away from the grip of nationally-formed imaginaries and identity politics toward an alternatively conceived view of space and of human relations within it” (“Detour” 114). In other words, diaspora facilitates a critical inquiry not only into the limits of transnational forms of identity but also into specific modes of inhabiting and reconfiguring social and national space. Such negotiations of diasporic space, as James Clifford underscores, “are always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diasporas and diaspora cultures to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experience” (313). Conceptualizing diaspora as an analytical category of cultural knowledge production, then, also requires an analysis of the “kinds of thinking and acting” diaspora “might repress” (Brydon, “It’s Time” 23) and the ways in which differently gendered identities are performed against “the claims of new and old patriarchies” and nationalities (Clifford 314). In a less abstract sense, then, we must ask what kinds of knowledge the notion of diaspora produces in the novels at hand. How, for example, does diaspora normalize transnational lifestyles and identities?

*Anil’s Ghost* represents and, as I suggest, regulates diasporic identity through both the construction of Anil as a nomadic subject and its narrative’s modernist configuration of history. First, Anil’s transnational mobility and her sense of an absolute cultural and social displacement mark her as a nomadic character, while projecting a critique of the potentially disempowering effects of diasporic identity concepts. Second, the narrative links Anil’s character to the political failure of non-governmental organizations to intervene effectively into the human rights violations committed by Sri Lanka’s government. To establish this kind of analogy, however, the narrative represses some of the most vital and empowering aspects of diaspora identity in favour of a nomadic configuration of identity, thus subordinating Anil’s potential agency as a diasporic woman to the novel’s modernist aesthetic and philosophical agenda. The novel’s critique of diaspora, however, not only accounts for Anil’s character development but also shapes its narrative form. The latter is reflected in the narrative’s dramatization of history as a form of personal amnesia and an anarchic force of violence, which, in Ondaatje’s literary universe, shapes individual and collective histories alike.<sup>9</sup>

From its first pages, the novel presents Anil as a global citizen whose forensic work for a human rights organization takes her from war-torn



Guatemala to the Congo and eventually back to Sri Lanka, her country of origin. Anil initially left Sri Lanka to study in England. During her “years abroad” (54), she “had courted foreignness” (54) and the clarity that presumably lies in being a distant observer of cultures. As a cosmopolitan traveller rather than a diasporan, Anil “was at ease on the Bakerloo line or the highways around Santa Fe. She felt completed abroad. . . . And she had come to expect clearly marked roads to the source of most mysteries” (54). While her “freedom of mobility” (Bauman 3) marks her as a diasporic person, it does not enable her to acknowledge her cultural difference and liminal position in the colonial metropolis in self-empowering or critical ways. Indeed, the narrative frequently suggests that Anil’s experience of cultural and social displacement presents a cultural impediment that keeps her suspended in a state of perpetual foreignness and transition rather than allowing her to inhabit multiple cultural and historical spaces at once. She remains caught in the zone of the nomad, “in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzi*” (Deleuze and Guattari 25). Her home is that of a nomad, “a home,” in Ian Baucom’s eloquent words, “whose rooms are walled by the dislocations of travel” (202).

When Anil arrives in Sri Lanka after fifteen years of absence, she insists on not being called the “return[ing] . . . prodigal” (10). For Anil has put her Sri Lankan childhood behind her and “the island,” as the omniscient narrator tells us, “no longer held her by the past . . . She had now lived abroad long enough to interpret Sri Lanka with a long-distance gaze” (11). Anil, then, assumes an ambiguous position vis-à-vis her country of origin, a position that is at once invested with power — inscribed in the technologies of the gaze — and, in contrast to current models of diaspora, marked not by memory but by a disavowal of the past. In fact, all of Anil’s past connections with Sri Lanka seem to be defined by absence, rupture, and failure. For example, her decision to get married to a fellow Sri Lankan student to assuage her feelings of cultural “uncertainty” (141) leads to disaster and eventually to her abandonment of her Sinhala language (145) and, by extension, her Sri Lankan past. In contrast to Rey Chow’s argument that diaspora constructs at once “permanent” and hybrid belongings and thereby comprises “the reality of being intellectual” (15), Anil’s diasporic existence frequently generates a state of nervousness and amnesia that detaches her from her immediate environment. It is this state of individual and social alienation that also characterizes her relationship with her lover Cullis and her girlfriend Leaf. They are long-distance relationships without commitment and, at times, are almost anonymous in their lack of intimacy.

If the novel's critique of diaspora is primarily enacted through Anil, then her representation as an emotionally and socially impoverished character without social and personal agency negates the possibility of imagining diasporic identities in politically and culturally meaningful ways. It is, of course, possible to interpret Anil's psychological detachments as symptomatic of a traumatized personality. Her alienation might be the inevitable result of her desire to choose a national home on her own terms. For, as Rinaldo Walcott maintains, "to belong entails forgetting and repression of elsewhere" (75) and thus a kind of emplacement, which acknowledges multiple loyalties to culturally competing places of belonging. It seems to me, however, that it is precisely this kind of multiple — spatial, cultural, and historical — grounding the novel withholds from Anil. For, as I argued earlier, Anil's rather truncated character development derives from its inscriptions into a nomadic rather than diasporic framework of identity. The nomadic constellation of her character also performs the double task of neutralizing Anil's gender identity and generating a conservatively gendered rhetoric of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

Given that the figure of the nomad is often designed as a gender-neutral figure, it seems initially surprising that Anil's gender identity results, in part, from her refusal to accept her initially given names. Instead, she offers her brother "a pen set" and "a sexual favour" (68) in exchange for his unused middle name. Anil's name, then, appears to foreground a certain androgynous quality of her character because its shape and sound conveys a particular "feminine air" (68), while the story of obtaining it speaks to Anil's masculine, predatory qualities. Here the novel specifically casts Anil in the role of the hunter, underscoring the traditionally male connotations of her name. For, "she'd hunted down the desired name like a specific lover she had seen and wanted" (68). Yet this particular account of Anil's name relies on received gender norms by equating the feminine with passivity and physical form and the masculine with action and determination. As foreshadowed in her name, Anil's character is instrumental in constructing gender stereotypes through the logic of cultural binarisms. For her condition of radical displacement appears as a sort of carefreeness that contrasts the novel's idealized mother figures, who "bow in affection or grief" (157), and selfless female caregivers such as Lakma, Palipana's niece. Interestingly, and in contrast to *The Hero's Walk*, *Anil's Ghost* perpetuates the modernist practice of equating the local with the traditional by, first, inscribing this space with received female gender constructs and, second, positioning the figure of the transnationally mobile woman as the object subject who is outside of the local. Thus, as a nomadic subject, Anil produces, rather than

subverts, the local and the national as a gendered space, while inadvertently securing its regulatory boundaries.

Configured as a nomadic character, Anil projects a radical critique of diasporic forms of (un)belonging and their potential to intervene effectively into normative patterns of identity. More precisely, by giving prominence to perpetual displacement and spatial mobility, Anil's character bolsters dominant models not only of identity but also of cultural knowledge production. During her work abroad, Anil "had come to expect clearly marked roads to the source of most mysteries" (54). She believes in the grand narratives of Western civilization, in the empirical Truth and Reason that punctuate "songs of anger and judgement" (70). For her, as Sarath observes, "the journey was in getting to the truth" (156) so as to identify the perpetrators of political killings in a war that was fought for its own sake and where truth had become meaningless. Anil's "permanent truths" consist in the "facts of ... death" she can surmise from a skeleton (64). They are the "same for Colombo as for Troy" (64), implying that death as well as its causes are universal and ahistorical occurrences. Similar to the binary logic and moral principles of the American western movies Anil likes to watch, her strategies of knowing are determined by her desire to find a single truth with which to distinguish between the guilty and the innocent. Anil literally grounds her ways of knowing, to quote Stuart Hall, "in the archeology" rather than in the "*re-telling* of the past" ("Cultural" 393). Linked to the technologies of remembrance and memory, the "*re-telling*" of the past is a critical site of diasporic knowledge production, which is, however, largely absent from the narrative of *Anil's Ghost*.

To account for this absence, we need to address the ways in which the novel's discourse of history rethinks the constitutive role of history in processes of nation formation and operates as a critique of diaspora embedded in the novel's narrative structure. Anil's love for the unexpected details and imprints of history reflects an understanding of history that bursts the conventional linear frames of time and place. What archeological findings teach her is that

The most precisely recorded moments of history lay adjacent to the extreme actions of nature and civilization. ... Tectonic slips and brutal human violence provided random time-capsules of unhistorical lives. A dog in Pompeii. A gardener's shadow in Hiroshima. But in the midst of such events, she realized, there could never be any logic to the human violence without the distance of time. (55)

Here, the arbitrariness of primordial chaos and the anarchism of violence

not only govern nature and humans alike but also supersede history and politics. They indiscriminately compress the grand narratives and *petit recits* of history into a total, singular present of perpetual uncertainty and political unaccountability. In a similar vein, the anthropologist David Scott has recently called for strategically “dehistoricizing” Sri Lankan history (103). Scott suggests that devaluing history as a founding category of Sri Lanka’s narrative of the nation breaks the presumably “natural ... link between past identities and the legitimacy of present political claims” (103). This strategy is certainly useful because it not only uncouples Sri Lanka’s colonially shaped and glorified ancient Sinhalese past from its present claims to political power, but it also de-ethnicizes Sri Lanka’s conflict in order to facilitate peace negotiations. But in the context of Ondaatje’s novel, dehistoricizing the present posits violence as a transhistorical category that fails to address the unequal political power relations, which, after all, lie at the heart of Sri Lanka’s war. Moreover, to substitute history for the erratic operations of violence also betrays the novel’s modernist signature and its desire to seek refuge in Robert Duncan’s prose.

Following the suicide attempt of Ananda, a traumatized war victim and eye-painter of Buddha statues who eventually initiates a symbolic process of communal healing, the narrator finds comfort in Duncan’s words: “The drama of our time ... is the coming of all men into one fate” (203). While the reference foregrounds the interdependence between acts of private and public violence, it reflects a yearning for a creative amnesia and universal human community. In his reading of H.D.’s work, Duncan specifies that the act of “coming into one fate” is also the

‘dream of everyone, everywhere.’ The fate or dream is the fate of more than mankind ... We have gone beyond the reality of the incomparable nation or race, the incomparable ... species, in which identity might hold and defend its boundaries against an alien territory. All things have now come into their comparisons ... We go now to the once-called primitive — to the bushman, the child, or the ape — not to read what we were but what we are. (91)

Like the narrator’s desire to dehistoricize Sri Lanka’s past in *Anil’s Ghost*, this passage buttresses rather than questions a modernist belief in the possibility of living outside of history. Yet, as with most universalizing pronouncements of a common humanity, Duncan’s erases cultural and political particularities and locates, in Bhabha’s words, an implied transcendental subject “at the point where conflict and difference resolves and

all ideology ends” (“Representation” 104). Duncan’s emphasis on the modernist quest for redemption through the arts of indigenous peoples perpetuates an imperial process of self-constitutive Othering and thereby exposes the hegemonic nature of his brand of universalism. It is this process of Othering that, I believe, is also at work in the novel’s representation of artisanship. With a view to *Anil’s Ghost*, Duncan’s vision of one human fate translates into the novel’s repudiation of cultural differences and its faith in the transformative power of art and local craftsmanship. Both aspects contribute to a depoliticized and dehistoricized understanding of Sri Lanka’s past and present.

On a formal rather than thematic level, Duncan’s notion of “the coming of all men into one fate” and “all things ... into their comparison” underlies the narrative logic of *Anil’s Ghost*. Each of the novel’s stories acts as a fragment and is juxtaposed to another story. Yet, none of them seems to be more significant than the other, when considered in relation to each other. Together they make up a perfect assemblage, whose mode of dispersal is that of the rhizome. For example, Gamini’s and Sarath’s private war over a woman reflects Sri Lanka’s civil war; Anil’s search for Sailor’s past mirrors her friend Leaf’s struggle against Alzheimer’s disease; Western movies assume the same significance as the *Culavamsa*, one of the founding chronicles in Sinhalese nation narration; “One victim can speak for many victims” (176); and the torture and violence committed against the people in the Congo, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sri Lanka all have come “into their comparison.” The particularities of each victim’s life and each war’s historical and political genealogy give way to an understanding of war as a universal and perennial catastrophe. As Lakdasa, Gamini’s colleague says, “The problem up here is not the Tamil problem, it’s the human problem” (245). Like the dispersal of the rhizome, then, the novel’s narrative fragments the particular genealogies of war and individual experiences of villages and war victims into the “simultaneous sprouts” of one story of human tragedy (Kaplan 87). Yet, by bringing all “things into their comparison,” the novel not only risks acts of comparative victimization, but it also reflects what the political scientist Mary Kaldor describes as a “fatalistic” response to the “new wars” (113).<sup>10</sup> She suggests that “because the [new] wars cannot be understood in traditional terms, they are thought to represent a reversion of primitivism or anarchy and the most that can be done, therefore, is to ameliorate the symptoms. In other words, wars are treated as natural disasters ... [and] emptied of political meaning” (113). Thus, with its emphasis on a relational understanding of human conflicts and its

modernist desire to treat history as an instance of anarchic violence or a “natural disaster,” the novel’s narrative structure continues and reflects its critique of the limits of diasporic agency inscribed in Anil’s character.

The novel’s modernist articulation of history, then, negates the possibility of crafting politically productive concepts of diasporic identity. In this context, it is no coincidence that the novel’s critique of the inefficiency of non-governmental human rights organizations is coupled with its representation of Anil as a diasporic character. As a human rights worker and forensic specialist, Anil has travelled the globe on several fact-finding missions and knows about the compromises, “back-room deals and muted statements for the ‘good of the nation’” (28), that are necessary to accomplish at least a fraction of her work. An earlier human rights investigation in the “Congo” failed because of the group’s dependency on the goodwill of the government it sought to indict. After the overnight disappearance of their data, the human rights activists, including Anil, “had nothing left to do but get on a plane and go home. So much for the international authority of Geneva” (28-29). The narrator’s disillusioned comments reflect a few of the critical arguments leveled against NGOs and their ambiguous position in the field of global politics. Pheng Cheah, for example, argues that “international human-rights NGOs” are anti localist and “creatures of intellectuals aimed at promoting a wider consciousness of humanity as a whole through the power of rational or affective persuasion” (315). They often depend on and work through a postnational political order that detaches them from the people on whose behalf they work. It is this kind of discrepancy between international human rights workers, such as Anil, and those stranded in the midst of international theaters of war, such as Sarath, that explains Anil’s misjudged trust in Dr. Perera, which ultimately leads to the failure of Anil’s investigation and Sarath’s death.

The ambiguous status of NGOs, especially their difficulty — if not ineffectiveness — to intervene into the diplomatic rule of non-interference in a nation’s internal affairs, then, is mirrored in Anil’s blindness towards the ways in which her identity evolves in relation to dominant ideologies of gender, history, and transnationalism. As with Alice Gull’s ultimately failed socialist commitment to “responsible citizenship” (Davey 253) in Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, *Anil’s Ghost* refuses to confer political agency to Anil and, instead, prefers the arts as a conduit of cultural syncretism and human reconciliation on a global scale. While *Anil’s Ghost* draws attention to the theoretical pitfalls of diaspora and teaches us about the spectral presence of the West in Sri Lanka’s postcolonial civil war, it cannot conceive of diaspora in terms other than the culturally and politically

ambiguous position of the nomadic subject and returned native informant.<sup>11</sup> *Anil's Ghost's* profound critique of the political limits of diaporic agency in bringing about global justice and exposing sustained international human rights abuses stands as a crucial warning against the fabrication of diaspora as yet another “closet idealism” (Cheah 302) to assuage the unsettling effects of globalization. But, as I have argued, *Anil's Ghost* also filters the concept of diaspora through its modernist or nomadic idiom. As a corollary, Ondaatje's novel remains hard pressed to account for the ways in which diaspora critically interweaves global and local forms of belonging while generating “intensely inventive, renewing forms of identity and embodiment” (Crane and Mohanram ix).

### Dis-Locations and Cross-Currents of Diaspora

In contrast to *Anil's Ghost*, *The Hero's Walk* dramatizes the formation of diasporic identities as an interdependent process of individual self-discovery and social reconnection on a local rather than a global level. This process frequently depends on the protagonist Sripathi Rao and his ability both to remember and reluctantly reevaluate his own and his family's pasts. Having never left his hometown of Toturpuram, Sripathi initially depicts a culturally rooted rather than mobile character. It is not until he has to move his granddaughter Nandana from Canada to India that he comes to occupy a diasporic space. But such a space, as Avtar Brah argues, is “inhabited not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. . . . The concept of diaspora space . . . includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’” (209). At first glance, Brah's notion of diaspora raises two issues that continue to haunt diaspora studies. First, it implies that diaspora functions as an idealized umbrella term for all forms of cultural displacements when, in fact, it is necessary to make a historical distinction between old and new diasporas. Old diasporas generally encompass those African, Caribbean, and South Asian cultures that were brutally deracinated from their homelands and experienced permanent dislocations during the intertwined histories of slavery, Indian indentureship, and colonialism. The term “new diasporas” refers to the massive displacement and migration of people and refugees whose countries of origin often bear the brunt of long-term Western and imperial control, are plagued by neocolonial and corrupt governments, and are marked by the erosion of the civil structures of the postcolonial nation-state. Second, Brah's understanding of diaspora might be read as a way of appropri-

ating spaces of native self-representation and, to adapt the Maori theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith's term, "trading" colonially constructed images of "the Other" (89) on the global marketplace.<sup>12</sup> Thus, a concept of diaspora that includes those who are forced to "stay put" or do so on their own accord may be misread as a relativist construct of cultural identity. For it risks ignoring the specific histories of indigenous peoples in which becoming diasporic meant and still means to be divided as a people and dispossessed of land and rights.

In a second reading, which, I believe, does more justice to Brah's understanding of diaspora, we may argue that the "genealogies of dispersion" intersect "with those of 'staying put'" in that both are subjected to dominant technologies of cultural representation. Brah's dialectic of diasporic and native underscores the ambiguous nature of diaspora as a category of cultural knowledge production. More specifically, while diasporas interrupt the nation's dream of homogeneity and clearly defined borders, they are also forced into the service of the nation-state. By assimilating displaced people or fostering the desire and possibility of returning to their place of origin, the nation-state exerts a constraining power and regulates diasporic flows of people. In this way, the state cultivates what Mishra calls the "reactionary streak" in diasporas ("New Lamps" 67). Moreover, by constructing diasporas as inherently unified and closed cultural entities, the state permits the "dominant society" to exercise, in Kamboureli's astute words, its "disciplinary gaze," which commodifies and "fetishiz[es]" "ethnic" and diasporic "imaginaries" (110). In order to understand their different historical genealogies and political effects within the nation-state, it is necessary to differentiate between forced diasporas, flexible transnational diasporas, and intra-national diasporas. The political effectiveness of the latter notion of diaspora depends on how, to quote Paul Gilroy's terms, it "problematizes the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging" and breaks the presumably natural bond between "place, location, and consciousness" (123). Intra-national diasporas, then, engage in a critical discourse of emplacement rather than transnational mobility and designate the fragmentation and reconstitution of social space through the local effects of global events. In *The Hero's Walk*, becoming diasporic entails breaching the different political, social, and psychological regimes of the normal. In fact, Sripathi and Arun emerge as diasporic characters precisely because they "stay put" and witness the ways in which the material effects of global developments transform their quotidian lives. At the same time, their diasporic agency is contingent on the diasporic configuration of Maya and Nandana and, thereby, raises questions about the ways in which



the constitution of diasporic identities is contingent on normative gender identities. In different ways, the novel's narrative construction of diasporic subjects effects a critique of the postcolonial nation-state without subscribing to a unified, one-world vision of global belonging.

In light of the psychic and political interdependence of the state and the various diasporas living within its borders, diaspora designates less a postnational phenomenon than heterogeneous communities that might generate or regulate political dissent. In either case, these communities mediate the legitimacy of national boundaries and forms of government in their imperial past and their global present. Moreover, in contrast to multicultural narratives of the nation, diasporic narratives, such as *The Hero's Walk*, do not rely on the nation to redeem its migrant or diasporic subjects. On the contrary, it is, in Ian Baucom's words, the "space of cultural [and I would add, domestic and national] inhabitation which must be redeemed" (208-09) through the diasporic presence. This, at least, is the case with Sripathi's son, Arun, whose political activism is directed against both India's lackadaisical environmental politics and their locally devastating effects and the ecological catastrophes generated through the ruthlessness and irresponsibility of global economic politics. At the same time, initiating a critical dialogue between the nation-state and its diasporic constituencies often presupposes acts of remembrance that deal with the individual and collective traumas suffered by those who experienced "forced dispersal and reluctant scattering" (Gilroy 123). These experiences of trauma and violent psychic and cultural dislocation must be retold through everyday life-events in the present location of displacement and reenacted through genealogical forms of diasporic remembrance. Indeed, the development of a diasporic consciousness relies on a critical awareness of the dangers that, in Gilroy's words, consist in "forgetting the location of origin and the tearful process of dispersal" (124). In *The Hero's Walk* it is Sripathi's traumatic loss of his daughter and his journey to Canada that compel him to remember and reenact the past, and, eventually, mark him as a diasporic character.

The novel's main narrative focusses on the relationship between Sripathi Rao, a middle-aged, jaded copy-writer and family man, Nandana, his Canadian granddaughter, and Arun, his son. At the beginning of the novel Sripathi appears as a contemptuous, egocentric, and paternalistic character. Embarrassed by his son's work as an environmental activist and unable to forgive his daughter Maya for having married a white Canadian rather than the man of his choice, Sripathi has isolated himself from his wife and children. Instead of confronting why he "allowed himself to forget"

(46) the reasons for the present disintegrated state of his family, Sripathi finds it easier to “express his deepest thoughts ... [and] emotions” (8) in letters to the editors of various local newspapers. Ironically, he writes these letters under his chosen pseudonym “Pro Bono Publico.” The signature — “on behalf of the people” (9) —, he imagines, makes him a secret hero, “a crusader” of “the “world in pen and ink” (9), when, in fact, his letters ironically contrast his impending unemployment as a writer and emphasize his increased alienation from his family and social community. For example, although Sripathi dedicates a letter to the environmental pollution of his neighbourhood, he largely ignores how, in Roy Miki’s words, the negative effects of globalization have seeped into the “nooks and crannies of [his] everyday li[fe]” (214): the sewage canals regularly overflow until they flood Sripathi’s house, his mother considers having a TV as a social status symbol, and the “traffic policemen” no longer wear turbans because “the latest chief minister had a passion for Hollywood westerns” and changed the uniforms of the entire police force (133).

The breakdown of public services and the travesty and arbitrariness of local politics that shape Sripathi’s environment raise further questions about the relationship between the nation-state and the process of becoming diasporic. Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World” offers a useful elaboration of my earlier discussion of the role of the nation-state in the context of diaspora. More specifically, Spivak challenges conventional articulations of diaspora in terms of “global hybridity” from “the point of view of popular culture, military intervention, and the neo-colonialism of the multinationals” (89). Instead, she aptly argues, diaspora should be read as a result of the “failure of a civil society in developing nations. ... The undermining of the civil structures of society is now a global situation ... [and] the manipulation of civil social structures [takes place] in the interest of the financialization of the globe” (91). Spivak squarely situates diaspora within a critique of the postcolonial nation-state and insists on the limits of diasporic concepts of identity as they are embodied in the figure of the indigenous, female subaltern. On one level, Spivak’s unconventional reading of diaspora elucidates the global entanglements of Toturpuram’s local politics, Sripathi’s home. On another, reading diaspora through the dismantling of the social and public structures of postcolonial and, as I wish to add, Western civil societies delinks diaspora from the dominant imperative of spatial mobility and, instead, stresses its function as a political discourse of intersecting genealogies of local and global displacement.

Although *The Hero’s Walk* explores national and local configurations

of diasporic space, its narrative centres on Sripathi's development of a diasporic consciousness. When Sripathi and his family receive the news of Maya's and her husband's fatal car accident, they experience a dramatic upheaval. For Sripathi, this event functions as the trauma that inaugurates his cultural and personal process of transformation and is played out on different levels. First, his daughter's death requires him to travel to Canada to arrange for his granddaughter's reverse journey to India, a move that marks her as doubly diasporic. What Sripathi calls his "foreign trip" to Vancouver turns out to be an experience of profound psychic and cultural dislocation, for it completely "unmoor[s him] from the earth after fifty-seven years of being tied to it" (140). Sripathi's sense of deracination establishes a historical continuity between the psycho-biographies of nineteenth-century Indian indentured labourers — narrated in, for example, V.S. Naipaul's and M.G. Vassanji's novels and Cyril Dabydeen's and David Dabydeen's poetry — and Sripathi's own emerging diasporic condition. Not only must he confront his own fear of a world that is no longer knowable to him, but, more importantly, he must face his granddaughter. Nandana has been literally silenced by the trauma of her parents' death, and her relocation from Canada to Tamil Nadu initially exacerbates her psychological condition. To Sripathi, however, Nandana's presence acts as a constant reminder of his regret of not having "know[n] his daughter's inner life" (147) as well as her life in Canada. He now recognizes that in the past he denied his daughter his love in order to uphold his authority over his family in light of a materially alienated and politically insecure world around him. To maintain a sense of patriarchal control, if not power, Sripathi relies on culturally purist narratives of belonging and disavows what appears to have shaped his life all along, namely his fear of social demotion and the diasporic reconfiguration of his family and social relationships. Both of these aspects are connected in that Sripathi is initially unable to consider his situation in the larger context of Toturpuram's belated entry into global modernity. More precisely, his fear of losing his social status is rooted in his estrangement from his community, workplace, cultural traditions, and family, which characterizes, as Keya Ganguly explains via Walter Benjamin, "the subjective condition of being modern" (52). To Sripathi, becoming diasporic entails that he recognize the impossibility of stemming the tide of global modernity through an act of personal self-enhancement that prevents him from reconnecting with his dead daughter, his family, and larger community. In fact, Sripathi's symbolic act of "cutting [Maya] off as if she were a diseased limb" (32) — of expelling from his personal life everything that is unsettling yet always

already present — comes back to haunt him through his own experience of having to contend with an increasingly dematerializing body.

After his return from Vancouver, he “become[s] more aware than ever that the world [is] full of unseen things, of memories and thoughts, longings and nightmares, anger, regret, madness” (172). And dealing with these memories becomes inevitable because, like Saleem’s body in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Sripathi’s body registers and mediates particular memories and discourses of race and the nation. At various points Sripathi feels that parts of his body are regularly vanishing and he experiences what could be diagnosed as phantom limb pain. But unlike phantom limb pain, the physical inscriptions of Sripathi’s traumatic experiences appear in various places of his body so that the pain he feels can neither be restricted to a clearly defined area nor tied to a single source. The pain itself seems to emulate diasporic movements. Sripathi’s vanishing body parts indicate his loss of a holistic self-image, while symbolically enacting the ecological decay and political corruption of the nation. Indeed, such a reading of Sripathi’s body corresponds to a historical materialist understanding of the traumatized body as either a “conductor for the thrusts and repetitions of everyday life in the modern world” or a “mechanism for ‘absorbing’ ... the alienation produced by a system in which money is the real measure of man” (Ganguly 15). While Sripathi’s physical pain reflects his psychic state of displacement and the decay of his material world, we need to note that Sripathi’s body is not merely a receptacle but also a producer of power. Given the body’s configuration as a material product of power, the disappearance of Sripathi’s body parts performs his sense of powerlessness in the face of the past events and their global magnitude (39). The dissolving body parts also signal a change of the ways in which Sripathi produces knowledge. No longer can he subscribe to the existence of a single truth with which he previously judged his daughter’s decision and defended his own self-righteous behaviour towards Arun. Instead, he is forced to acknowledge that “he could never be sure of anything in the world again, not even his own body” (162). It is through his body’s enactments of his experiences of trauma and dislocation that Sripathi must rearticulate his body and identity in non-foundationalist terms. He learns to reread his body as both a product of capitalist power relations and a site of cultural agency. Being subject to representation, his body is product and producer of the regimes of the normal. To put it differently, his body denotes the totality of his being — the “sum of all that happens in the world around us” (213) — as well as the excess that prevents this totality from metamorphosing into yet another normative or naturalized form of identity.

The constitution of diasporic identity, then, involves processes of both emplacement and embodiment. So far, however, these processes have been linked to the construction of male diasporic identities, even though the fragmentation and emasculation of Sripathi's character indicate a certain blurring of received gender categories under conditions of social and cultural displacement. This, however, does not mean that Sripathi's diasporic transformation takes place outside the technologies of gender. On the contrary, it is contingent on both Nandana's and Maya's unsettling effects on the everyday life of the Rao household. Nandana's arrival in Toturpuram, I suggest, symbolically restructures domestic (i.e., traditionally female) space in terms of public space. Through the death of her parents, Nandana experiences the instability of her home environment and the illusion of safety and harmony often attached to the notion of home. Moreover, Sripathi's resolution to "take her home to India" (143) further complicates the ways in which Nandana negotiates home as a locus of diasporic displacement. More specifically, Nandana brings the postcolonial moment of what Homi Bhabha has famously termed the "unhomely" (*Location* 9) into the privacy of the Big House, Sripathi's family home. The "unhomely" reconfigures domestic space as "sites for history's most intricate invasions" (9) and confuses "the home and the world" (9). Thus, the "unhomely," Bhabha argues, enforces a "vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (9). This experience of cultural disorientation literally shapes diasporic forms of embodiment, as Nandana's loss of speech and Sripathi's disappearing body parts amply testify. If Nandana is an agent of the "unhomely," carrying in her baggage the global realities of displacement and uncertainties of belonging, her arrival in India also unsettles the neatly gendered and "patriarchal . . . symmetry of private and public" spaces (Bhabha, *Location* 11). For example, with Nandana's entry into the lives of the Rao women, Putti, Sripathi's sister, finally manages to rebel against her manipulative mother and, against the caste prejudices rampant in her family and society, marries a man from the dalit caste. In fact, it is the domestic space of the home which, through Nandana's witnessing eyes, becomes a site of conflict and crisis that "is converted into criticism of the [patriarchal] status quo" (Ganguly 70). In light of the operative modes of the "unhomely," becoming diasporic entails disturbing the regimes of the normal of everyday life and destabilizing received configurations of the private and the public.

In contrast to Nandana, Maya acts as the novel's most conventional diasporic character. She is the defiant and heroic daughter who "had dared everyone" (46) and lives as a haunting presence in her father's and brother's consciousness. Interestingly, the novel's dramatization of Maya's

and Sripathi's relationship suggests that Sripathi's painful "labour of self-erasure and self-fabrication" (Baucom 202) — the labour of becoming diasporic while "staying put" — results from a crisis of patriarchal authority rather than from an experience of spatial dislocation. From the time of her birth, in the eyes of Sripathi, Maya was the "perfectly formed creature" he "had fathered" (95) and designated "to reach for the skies, nothing less" (96). While these sentiments might reflect no more than the proud hopes of a young father, they are also symptomatic of Sripathi's fears of social failure, poverty, and decline in class status (70). In Sripathi's life, to adopt Seyla Benhabib's apt phrase, Maya serves as "the symbolic-cultural site" upon which Sripathi inscribes his patriarchal "moral order" (84). It is only with Maya's admission to an American university and "an offer of marriage" that "Sripathi's life began to acquire a glow" (70). Indeed, Maya's engagement to Prakash Bhat, the son of a rich family who "had just started a job in Philadelphia" (99), is a match that would have permanently marked Maya as a diasporic subject and increased her father's social and financial standing. As a dutiful daughter, Maya is expected to honour her father's name and wish and, as her prospective father-in-law remarks, as the wife of a middle-class Indian expatriate, she is also expected to "fit into life in the West without losing sight of our Indian values" (100). In short, she would be the custodian and nurturer of cultural traditions in "renewed patriarchal structures" (Clifford 312) to foster an imagined unified and self-sufficient cultural community with strong ties to the Old World. But Maya cancels her engagement with Prakash to marry a Canadian man. By defying her father's wishes and forsaking her family duties (116), Maya, on the one hand, initiates her own transformation into a diasporic subject with multiple belongings and groundings; on the other, she confronts Sripathi with the changing reality of his social, personal and work environment and the decay of the civil society of India's nation-state. Both aspects eventually facilitate Sripathi's diasporic transformation. In other words, Maya's refusal brings to crisis Sripathi's patriarchal authority and thus undermines his last resort of control and power. What remains problematic, however, is that the novel assigns Maya the traditional task of diaspora women, namely the painful role of "mediating discrepant worlds" and of "connecting and disconnecting, forgetting and remembering, in complex, strategic ways" (Clifford 314). Thus, in the narrative logic of the novel, Maya's death is not an accident but a symbolic necessity that facilitates Sripathi's diasporic transformation.

Central to Sripathi's further development of a diasporic consciousness is his understanding of Arun's involvement in a non-Eurocentric environ-

mentalist movement. If Sripathi initially considers his son's activism as just "some other saving-the-world project" (238), Arun insists that his work is about a fight "against daily injustice, [against] our own people stealing our rights" and against globally sanctioned ecological irresponsibility (239). Directed against World Bank politics and the pressure exerted on the postcolonial nation-state to meet its debt obligations regardless of environmental consequences, Arun's environmental activism exemplifies what I have called an intra-national concept of diaspora. In contrast to *Anil's Ghost's* narrative of diaspora, *The Hero's Walk* dramatizes diaspora as a political category of identity not necessarily dependent on transnational mobility. On the contrary, it explores the intersections of local and global genealogies of belonging and displacement and, most of all, is essential to the constitution of translocal communities of "popular dissent" (Bleiker 1).

In contrast to the role of NGOs in *Anil's Ghost*, Arun's activist group cannot be easily co-opted by the ruling government. Instead, it assumes a critical position vis-à-vis the postcolonial nation-state. In Spivak's words, Arun's grassroots movement tries to "learn from subalternity and woman-space, areas that have not been considered as central resources for the conceptualization of the modern state" ("Supplementing" 114-15). As with other "non-eurocentric, globe-girdling" ecological "movements," Arun's is "not interested in state power" but risks what Spivak calls the "uncalculable" ("Supplementing" 115). The "uncalculable" refers to the risk of employing knowledge forms that are marginalized or scorned in mainstream Western academic institutions. Resistance movements such as Arun's then generate what Spivak calls "a sense of sacred nature" that "can help mobilize ... a globe-girdling ecological mind-set beyond the reasonable ... terms of long term global survival" (115). Sripathi's development of a diasporic consciousness, namely a consciousness that recognizes the interdependence of local and global developments on a personal and political level and risks the "uncalculable," is contiguous with his understanding of Arun's political commitment. When Sripathi finally agrees to accompany Arun to the beach to watch the arrival of the Olive Ridley turtles, he develops a sense of the importance of his son's work. For the first time, Sripathi is able to relate not only to his son but also to his dead daughter. While this act of recognition enables Sripathi to reconnect with his family and social environment, it does not result in a narrative closure. On the contrary, as time goes by, Sripathi once again writes a letter to the editor, but this time his letter remains unfinished and unsigned. I would like to see Sripathi's unfinished letter as a concession that diasporic identities, as I have discussed them here, remain an open process punctuated by complex mediations

between narrative absences and presences, between individual life-stories and globally interdependent economic and ecological structures.

Read together, *Anil's Ghost* and *The Hero's Walk* question such notions as the ancestral homeland and transnational mobility as foundationalist determinants of diaspora. From different perspectives both novels illuminate the theoretical fallacies that consist in turning the concept of diaspora into another all-encompassing allegory of postcolonial subjectivity. Perhaps more than *Anil's Ghost*, *The Hero's Walk* elucidates the ways in which becoming diasporic relates to the ruptures and rituals of everyday life and necessitates the abdication of one's privileges of gender, cultural location, race, and class. Particularly through the figure of Sripathi, *The Hero's Walk* suggests that being diasporic is not a cultural given but "a mode of operating within a cultural and historical canvas of understandings and misunderstandings about the emergence of this particular [diasporic] subject" (Ganguly 13). With a view to Canadian discourses of identity, Ondaatje's and Rau Badami's novels teach us to think global and national forms of belonging in diasporic terms as modes of reading and critique of both capitalist late modernity and the normalizing role of the nation-state. In many ways, then, *The Hero's Walk* and *Anil's Ghost* dramatize diaspora as a form of cultural critique that questions the very categories of identity. It is this ability to interrogate the nation and its quotidian regimes of normalization from within rather than against their global, cultural, and political discrepancies that makes diaspora a productive category of cultural knowledge production and literary analysis.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mishra's division of diasporas into old and new ones seems at times too schematic and unable to accommodate overlaps between both categories, especially since those overlaps are marked by gender constructions. Nourbese Philip's essay "Dis Place — 'The Space Between'" reads black women's sexuality as a public space of female exploitation and subversion. "Dis Place," which is both the "outer space" of "the plantation" and "the inner space between the



legs" (77) links the history of black slave women (i.e., the old diaspora) with the present of Trinidadian Jamette women, namely with prostitutes, dancers, or domestics, who are "regarded ... as transgressive" (111) (i.e., the new diaspora).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the defining elements of diaspora and an introductory historical survey or individual diasporas, see Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, and Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies." While Cohen places less emphasis on the idea of the homeland than Safran does, and, instead, foregrounds a "sense of co-ethnicity" (ix) as a shared trait of diasporas, his own table of common features of a diaspora nevertheless lists six out of nine points that are either directly or indirectly related to the role of the homeland in the diasporic imaginary. Neither of the theorists, however, addresses the internal contradictions and differences of diasporas. For an early and highly influential notion of diasporic identity as a "disaggregated identity" (721) that allows for difference within the subject and decentres the notion of the homeland in favour of a "dialectical synthesis" (720) of diasporic identity markers, see Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora."

<sup>3</sup> At the end of *The Second Scroll* and following the death of his uncle, the nephew realizes that "across the continents I had looked and searched for my kinsman, and now that I had found him — I would not ever look upon his face. Forever would I have to bear in my mind my own conjured image of Uncle Melech" (85). Here the death of the uncle creates the nephew's liminal identity and constructs the homeland as an elusive and uncanny space of diasporic desire within the particular history of the Jewish diaspora. These two contradictory markers of diasporic identity — liminality and the homeland — draw attention to the ambiguous position these two concepts occupy within diaspora theory in general. While I do not want to dispute their ability to intervene into totalizing discourses of nation formation, I want to remind us that they also derive from the biblical, thus foundationalist, narrative of diaspora. For, in Deuteronomy (28: 64-68), which is also and not coincidentally the title of *The Second Scroll's* last chapter (excluding the Glosses), the scattering of the tribes into the liminal spaces of foreign nations and the longing for an ever-receding homeland are part of God's punishment for disobeying His commandments.

<sup>4</sup> My argument is indebted to Keya Ganguly's proposition that in order to understand the material and historical dynamics of diaspora it is necessary to examine "how the appurtenances of diasporic consciousness — memory, myth, belongingness and tradition — are not sui generis. They are cast in their own shadow of inclusions and exclusions, all of which attempt to introject an image of totality that must be contested even as it is thematized as part of the ideological work of self-consolidation" (61-62). What I want to add to her argument is simply that the homeland and transnational mobility should be counted as dominant elements in the formation of a diasporic consciousness in need of further examination because, like the other "appurtenances of diasporic consciousness," they have been naturalized in both the diasporic imagination and in contemporary diaspora theory. For a recent attempt to "de-naturalize" the homeland in the context of Caribbean Canadian writing, see Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*.

<sup>5</sup> I believe it is possible to argue that the reconstruction of the Buddha figures and the boy's consoling gesture at the end of *Anil's Ghost* project a syncretic vision of a globally shared humanity uninterested in the power and politics of the Sri Lankan nation-state. It is through this reluctance to engage critically with the postcolonial nation-state that the novel inadvertently participates in the dominant ideologies of globalization. After all, as Makarand Paranjape argues with a view to India, the "world powers are not in favour of a strong independent, self-directed [postcolonial nation-state], but would prefer a weak, divided and pliant country that can be controlled and manipulated by them for their own convenience" (235).

<sup>6</sup> See, Barber, Wallerstein, and Jameson. To different degrees and from different political perspectives, all of these writers consider globalization as a phenomenon that homogenizes

the world through the worldwide dominance of American consumerism, popular communication technologies, and global capitalism.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Ahmad, *In Theory*; Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies*; Parry, "Problems."

<sup>8</sup> For some of the most influential and recent discussions of cultural hybridity, see Young, Brah and Coombes, and Werbner and Modood. For a recent discussion of hybridity by an indigenous artist and critic, see McLeod.

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent discussion of Ondaatje's metaphorical use of violence, chaos, and fear as integral aesthetic elements of his metapoetic writing and poetry, including *Handwriting*, a collection of poetry that artistically and thematically anticipates *Anil's Ghost*, see Vigurs.

<sup>10</sup> The new wars, or what some call low-intensity conflicts, are interested less in territorial control than they are in population control. Their goals, according to Kaldor, "are about identity politics in contrast to the geo-political or ideological goals of earlier wars" (6). The new wars, she argues, generally entail "a blurring between war . . . , organized violence . . . and large-scale violations of human rights" (2). They reflect a "predatory social condition" (107), take place in "a context which could be represented as an extreme version of globalization," and are highly rational in their application of violence and their "refusal [of] normative constraints" (Kaldor 100). I consider Sri Lanka's civil war as a "new war" because, first, the period from the mid 1980s to the 1990s — which is the period dramatized in *Anil's Ghost* — has marked the war with a new and unprecedented degree of violence that, in part, resulted from the corruption and erosion of the state's monopoly on legitimate organized violence. Lakdhasa may be correct in saying that the war is not a Tamil problem, but not, as he suggests, because the war has turned into a human problem. Rather, as with other new wars, Sri Lanka's war no longer revolves around issues of territorial reorganization but around population and identity control.

<sup>11</sup> In this context, I use the term "native informant" in its conventional meaning as a colonial intellectual educated and working in the West. For a discussion of the Native Informant as a figure of foreclosure and disclosure in the canonical texts of Western literature, history and philosophy, see Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

<sup>12</sup> For a critique of diaspora as silencing those who cannot or do not want to leave their land of origin, see Paranjape.

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