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THE FLUIDITY OF CULTURE: TRANSCULTURAL WRITING IN *ANIL'S GHOST*

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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, the world is experiencing an unprecedented cultural encounter and collision due to the increasing number of migrants and diasporas. To address this phenomenon, Wolfgang Welsch, a German professor of theoretical philosophy, introduced the concept of “transculturality” in the 1990s. He rejected the notion of cultural homogeneity and argued that culture is becoming more permeable and blending with nature. Building on this theory, Arianna Dagnino, an Italian-Australian scholar, developed the concept of “transcultural writer” to describe writers who possess diverse, pluralistic, and flexible identities in a transnational context. This paper probes into the transcultural consciousness in Philip Michael Ondaatje through a close analysis of the transcultural writing and identity in his novel *Anil's Ghost*. By drawing on the theory of transcultural writing, this paper is intended to expand the research perspective on Ondaatje and his works and to exemplify literary representation of transculturality.

**Keywords:** transculturality; Philip Michael Ondaatje; transcultural writing; *Anil's Ghost*;

I. Introduction

In the era of globalization, the number of immigrants and people living across national borders is increasing, and issues of differences, conflicts and coexistence brought about by the exchange of cultural ties are being played out every moment. People from all segments of society are globally mobile, experiencing dislocation, deterritorialization, and transcultural adaptation. Just as Katrak said: “Our contemporary world has seen migrations of people on a scale as never before in human history” (1991: 649). The contemporary era is placed in the context of post-modernity and post-colonialism, and in many ways, we are entering a mobile and uncertain world. In this context, immigrants and diasporas are confronted with radical questions: Who are we and where are we? These questions are vital for them when they leave their primary culture and meet differences and reflect themselves from the eyes of people from different cultures. In the past decades, scholars believed that they are trapped by the immigrant syndrome of anxiety and rootlessness which also affect the production and interpretation of the literary text.

Italian scholar Arianna Dagnino proposes a different perspective: instead of becoming the eternal marginalized, the transcultural group who live in this transnational context have been given opportunities to celebrate their diverse, pluralistic and flexible identities (Dagnino, 2015). Transcultural writers incorporate

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transculturality in their writing, the reproduction and dissemination of which in turn contribute to the development of transculturality, providing different perspectives to the coexistence of multiple cultures.

### 1. Michael Ondaatje and *Anil's Ghost*

Philip Michael Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka, a former British colony, which gave him a distinctive colonial cultural experience. He moved to England in 1954 and in 1962 to Canada, where he settled. At the age of ten, Ondaatje was sent to a public school, Dulwich College in London. At nineteen, he followed his older brother, Christopher, to Canada, where he took citizenship, went to university, got married, and began his writing career. He was educated at the University of Toronto and Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and began teaching at York University in Toronto in 1971. With ex-colonial background, immigrant exile experience, and exposure to diverse cultures, Ondaatje is regarded by Dagnino as a transcultural writer in her monograph (2015).

In the modern world, the expansion of Western imperialism in all directions results in the migration of populations from former colonial countries to the Western world. Those immigrants like Ondaatje have memories of traumatic past and translate their diasporic experience into cultural practice. *Anil's Ghost* (2001) sees Ondaatje dwelling increasingly on the history and landscape of his native country. Unfolding against the deeply evocative background of Sri Lanka's landscape and ancient civilization, *Anil's Ghost* is Michael Ondaatje's one of the most influential novels yet. Anil, a forensic expert commissioned by an international human rights organization, returns to her homeland Sri Lanka, trying to investigate the deaths and injuries of innocent civilians in the turmoil of the civil war. A skeleton 'sailor' deliberately transferred to a nature reserve becomes her chance to uncover the truth about the brutal war. This novel explores a variety of complex themes, including diaspora, postcolonialism, nationalism and identity. As such, *Anil's Ghost* presents an excellent opportunity for a fresh exploration of culture and identity from a new perspective.

### 2. Literature Review of *Anil's Ghost*

After the publication of Michael Ondaatje's works, a wide spectrum of research proliferated and studies of his writing have gradually expanded beyond the realm of postcolonial and postcolonial studies to include the domains of globalization and transnationalism. In 2005, Professor Steven Totosy de Zepetnek of Purdue University published a collection of essays entitled *Comparative Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje's Writing*, featuring twelve representative contributions to Ondaatje (2005). In 2013, Dr Spinks published the book *Michael Ondaatje*, presenting a comprehensive study of Michael Ondaatje's entire oeuvre within the context of postcolonial and postmodernist frameworks (Spinks, 2013). Compared to the previous volume, this book includes Ondaatje's poetry and exemplifies his poetic postmodernism. In addition to these significant and comprehensive works, scholars have also published essays and books on postmodernism, history, memory, postcolonialism, diaspora, and transnationalism, as reflected in Ondaatje's writings, making a distinctive contribution to the study of Michael Ondaatje. Among all his works, *Anil's Ghost* is one of the most influential and its protagonist can be considered as the projection of Michael Ondaatje himself. This paper examines *Anil's Ghost* within the context of transcultural writing and transculturality framework.

#### ***Anil's Ghost*: The Historical Fiction within Postmodernism and Postcolonialism Framework**

Ondaatje states in the author's note that: "*Anil's Ghost* is a fictional work set during this political time and historical moment. And while there existed organizations similar to those in this story, and similar events took place, the characters and incidents in the novel are invented" (2001: 4). Ondaatje's novel can be considered a metahistorical novel as he employs a unique narrative approach to depict the history of Sri Lanka. Chinese scholar Wang Ping argues that Ondaatje uses "the media of literature to reconstruct poetic truth to challenge the function of history" (2017: 37) with a "strong postmodern historical consciousness that questions the reliability of historical reproduction and narrative" (2017: 42). Except for the postmodern perspective, Sri Lankan scholar Hewa discusses this historic fiction within the postcolonial framework. Hewa conducts a textual analysis of *Anil's Ghost* to understand "how the concepts of history and identity are multifaceted and fluid, thereby challenging hegemonic perspectives that construct a single story" (2021: 17). The postmodernist historical

perspective has been applied to Michael Ondaatje's works for many years. However, most scholars have focused on the metahistorical features of *Running in the Family* and *The English Patient* rather than *Anil's Ghost*. Nonetheless, *Anil's Ghost* can also be regarded as a rebellion against traditional historical authority and the hegemonic history of colonialism.

#### ***Anil's Ghost: The Traumatic Fiction within Postcolonialism Framework***

Ondaatje's works demonstrate a clear presence of postcolonial and civil war trauma, especially in *Anil's Ghost* and *The English Patient*. The most representative research on trauma is *The Heterotopic Spaces of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost* written by Australian scholar Victoria Burrow (2008). Burrow posited that Anil is a hybrid figure, embodying multiple cultural identities and a traumatic past. Anil represents the universal tendency to avoid confronting and acknowledging the traumatic history resulting from colonialism and civil war. (Burrow, 2008). Also, Victoria Burrow believes that Ondaatje's famously fragmentary and ambivalent narrative exposes the way in which the developed world turns away from the experience of trauma (2008). As we mentioned before, narrative techniques are an important direction for research on him to explore postcolonial trauma. The latest representative researcher Bede Scott explores the postcolonial emotion in the narrative discourse of *Anil's Ghost* and the way how this culture of terror can also influence the production of literature (2019), which creates a new perspective on studying postcolonial trauma.

#### ***Anil's Ghost: The Exploration for Identity within the Diasporic and Transnationalism Framework***

Because of the protagonist Anil's diasporic background, the diasporic identity is an academic fad since the publication of *Anil's Ghost*. In 2000, Glover explores the characters' identity in *Anil's Ghost* and *The English Patient* and argues that Ondaatje's novel presents "the dynamics of displacement, isolation and alienation, as well as strategies for survival" (2000: 79). These characters re-define themselves and seek for their place in the world through recognizing their difference and connecting with each other (2000). In 2003, Heike questioned "such notions as the ancestral homeland and transnational mobility as foundationalist determinants of diaspora" (2003: 66) by analyzing the diasporic identity in *Anil's Ghost* and *The Hero's Walk*. In 2004, Cook argues that "Ondaatje's text moves beyond the concept of a postcolonial literature of 'resistance' into an area that requires a theory of process rather than product" (2004: 6). Compared to the research before, she succeeds in capturing the transnational mobility and further studies the fluidity of transnational identity in *Anil's Ghost*. The article *Sri Lankan "Gates of Fire": Michael Ondaatje's Transnational Literature, from Running in the Family to Anil's Ghost*, examines the implication that "Transnational Fiction" is "a new way of understanding the complexity of identity and place" and presents Ondaatje's work as a challenge to received political and cultural ideas about Sri Lanka (Knowles, 2010).

Scholars have explored a broader range of realms and theories, including postmodernism, history, postcolonialism, trauma, diaspora, and transnationalism, yet the transcultural study of *Anil's Ghost* has taken a peripheral position. With the increasing number of immigrants and diasporas, culture has been redefined and freed from the limitation of a separate entity, which also leads to the trend of literary criticism from closed duality to open integration. In this instance, Michael Ondaatje's distinctive narrative techniques and complex identity may warrant a fresh perspective and terminology to accurately describe both him and his literary practices. As Dagnino puts it:

In most cases transcultural literature may have its roots in migration, as well as in postcolonial, diasporic, exile conditions and in identity displacement and the cultural dislocation that ensues; but then it detaches (or flows out) from them in a process of metamorphosis (2015: 148).

More than being a postmodern, postcolonial and a diasporic writer, Ondaatje is a transcultural writer with transcultural consciousness, pluralistic, and flexible identities. Going beyond the confines of postmodernism and diaspora, the narrative structure and identity in *Anil's Ghost* serve as critical components that showcase Ondaatje's transcultural consciousness, emphasizing the fluidity of culture as a pivotal aspect.

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## II. Theoretical Framework: Arianna Dagnino and Transcultural Writing

In the late 20th century, Wolfgang Welsch, a German philosophy professor, introduced the concept of transculturality. He posited that individuals are inherently transcultural and contended that contemporary cultures are no longer homogeneous. Instead, they exhibit various permeating and interdependent characteristics, resembling networks. Welsch elaborated on this concept in two essays: *Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Culture Today* (1999) and *Transculturality: The Changing Form of Cultures Today* (2001). He argues that the concept of culture developed by Johann Gottfried Herder at the end of the 18th century was based on a mono-ethnicity that separates one's culture from other cultures. Three determinants characterize Herder's concept are: societal homogenization, ethnic consolidation, and intercultural delimitation, which separates and opposes one's culture from other cultures and is outdated (Welsch, 2001).

His German essay, "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität?" argues that transculturality is evidenced through cultural expressions and lifestyles. Secondly, transculturality influences the formation of personal identity. Finally, there are associated changes in contemporary scientific theory and disciplinary approaches (2010). Transcultural connections have emerged as a prominent trend in cultural development. As Welsch aptly noted:

The old homogenizing and separatist ideas of cultures have furthermore been surpassed through cultures' external networking. Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other. Lifestyles are no longer at the borders of national cultures, but go beyond these, and are found in the same way in other cultures. The way of life for an economist, an academic or a journalist is no longer German or French, but rather European or global in tone. The new forms of entanglement are a consequence of migratory processes, as well as of worldwide material and immaterial communications systems and economic interdependencies and dependencies. It is here, of course, that questions of power come in (Welsch, 1999: 198).

Rather than providing a definition, Welsch identifies three primary domains of influence for transculturality: lifestyle, the development of personal identity, and contemporary scientific theories and disciplinary approaches. He argues against the dichotomous cultural homogeneity and points out that culture is permeating and blending into nature.

In 2015, Arianna Dagnino, an Italian-Australian scholar, based her concept of "transcultural writer" on the theories of transculturality to define those writers who develop diverse, pluralistic, and flexible identities in the transnational context. The core of Dagnino's transculturality theory and transcultural narrative is to turn the difficulties and challenges posed by issues of identity, culture, and language into a new opportunity for possibility, beginning, and growth, thus achieving a dialogue of mutual transformation and cultural intersection (Bu, 2018). She examines the role of mobility in the development of transcultural writing, noting that the experiences of displacement and relocation can give writers a unique perspective on cultural differences and enable them to create narratives that bridge different cultures and experiences. In an essay published prior to the book, Dagnino introduced the term "transpatriate" to describe the concept of individual cultural fluidity, as well as to elaborate on the transcultural lens that informs the writers' creations:

How the identity and cultural metamorphosis inherent in the 'dispatriation' process (the transcultural process that may be triggered by moving --- physically, virtually and imaginatively – outside one's cultural and homeland borders) allows these writers to adopt new creative modes through a transcultural lens, a perspective in which all cultures look decentered in relation to all other cultures, including one's own (2006: 96).

Therefore, this paper examines Ondaatje's transcultural consciousness in *Anil's Ghost*, which deconstructs the dichotomous view of culture. This cultural perspective is expounded upon through an examination of transcultural writing and transcultural identity in the novel.

### III. Transcultural Writing in *Anil's Ghost*

In regards to transcultural writing, Dagnino stresses its vital role in today's globalized world, where conventional ideas of culture and identity have become more fluid and blending. She defines transcultural writers as "early twenty-first-century authors who do not belong in one place or one culture—and usually not even to one language—and who write between cultures and are interested in the complex dynamics of cultural encounters and negotiations" (2006: 14). Transcultural writers possess the unique ability to explore new avenues of expression and to break free from the constraints of traditional literary genres, resulting in a fresh aesthetic that accurately reflects the intricate nature of modern society. (Dagnino, 2006). Building on the previous argument, this section explores how Ondaatje's transcultural writing is exemplified through his unique characterization and narrative techniques, which are made possible by his ability to fluidly navigate between cultures, showcasing his exceptional creative abilities.

#### 1. The Blending Nature of Culture: The Fictional Territoriality

Ondaatje portrays his cultural stance on the notion of a fixed cultural identity, which he sees as the root cause of conflict and violence. Just as Epstein argues that: "Transculturalism is especially needed in world politics, where the factor of fixed cultural identity based on race, ethnos, religion, or ideological commitments turned out to be a source of conflict and violence" (2009: 328).

Ondaatje also conveyed the similar sentiment in *Anil's Ghost* through the voice of the doctor:

This was when he stopped believing in man's rule on earth. He turned away from every person who stood up for a war. Or the principle of one's land, or pride of ownership, or even personal rights. All of those motives ended up somehow in the arms of careless power. One was no worse and no better than the enemy (2001: 95).

Ondaatje holds a strong aversion towards war and believes that its root cause lies in the concept of nationalism, which is closely tied to the idea of fixed cultural identity and the false notion of cultural homogeneity.

Ondaatje's characters are given transcultural backgrounds and experiences of diasporic life. He wrote in *The English Patient* (2009), "The sea of night sky, hawks in rows until they are released at dusk, arcing towards the last colour of the desert. A unison of performance like a handful of thrown seed" (Ondaatje, 2009: 171). The Chinese translator Tao Lixia said at the end of *Anil's ghost* (Chinese edition): If I had the opportunity to meet Ondaatje, the first question I would ask is why he incorporates the theme of diaspora so extensively in his novels. The characters in Ondaatje's works often depart from their homeland, leaving behind a trail of memories and longing, resembling a scattering of seeds carried away by the wind (Ondaatje, 2016). This part answers the question of how Ondaatje expresses his own cultural experience through the construction of deterritorialized characters, revealing his transcultural perspective through his literary practice.

Ondaatje presents the confluent nature of cultures through the perspective of transcultural characters. In *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje concentrates on the Sri Lankan civil war, which was incited by ethnic tensions. Under the influence of narrow nationalistic concepts, people are in constant contradiction and conflict, attempting to maintain cultural purity and ethnic boundaries to construct notions of home and national cultural identity in order to gain a fixed identity. Ondaatje conveys his aversion to nationalism, which can result in the imposition of a binary choice between cultures, leading to the creation of a fictitious self and causing conflicts and violence among individuals and nations. Currently, individuals are compelled to contemplate the progressively diverse world from a fresh perspective. Welsch argues that transculturality is not a novel concept but rather a rule that existed in ancient civilizations. The nature of culture is impure, and the boundaries between culture and nation are not clear-cut (2010). As a transcultural writer, Ondaatje is "at the forefront in capturing and expressing an emerging transcultural sensibility, the freedom of every person to live on the border of one's 'inborn' culture or beyond it" (Dagnino, 2006: 96). Ondaatje dwells on creating transcultural and neonomic characters and tends to inscribe himself in his novels. He "always invent characters who, for whatever reason, have opened up to the

world, so that through their sense of the world I can make a series of other connections” (Dagnino, 2015: 40), and this approach reflects a transcultural sensibility.

In the current global landscape marked by increasing international and mobile encounters, Ondaatje and other transcultural writers experience comparable psychological, social, and cultural fragmentation and deterritorialization as their characters (Dagnino, 2015). Their shared experience prompts them to confront the consequences of war and violence that arise from the idea of preserving a pure national culture, which embodies the cultural phenomenon of homogenization.

## 2. The Fluidity Nature of Culture: Deterritorialized Characters

Ondaatje’s deliberate construction of diasporic and transnational characters, along with his use of boundary-crossing writing techniques, is widely recognized in his literary works. By portraying characters with mixed cultural and ethnic backgrounds, Ondaatje challenges the notion of cultural homogenization, while his deterritorialized characters embody a consciousness that transcends stable physical and mental boundaries. Thus, his writing serves as a form of rebellion against cultural homogenization and a celebration of cultural fluidity. Ondaatje questions the notion of a pure and stable Sri Lankan identity. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that:

The very concepts of homogenous national cultures..... are in a profound process of redefinition.....The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure, ethnically cleansed national identity can only be achieved through the death.....there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities (2004: 5).

Michael Ondaatje’s novel, *Anil’s Ghost*, features the character of Anil Tissera, who shares similarities with the author himself. Like Ondaatje, Anil was born in Sri Lanka and later left her homeland to pursue a career as a forensic pathologist in the UK and USA. After 15 years, she returns to Sri Lanka during the civil war to work as a part of a UN Human Rights Investigation team to probe into the deaths and injuries of innocent civilians in the riots of the civil war.

Anil is a quintessential deterritorialized character with an international lifestyle and multicultural background. To begin with, Anil’s profession as a forensic expert requires her to work internationally, resulting in frequent travel from one country to another. Prior to her journey to Sri Lanka, Ondaatje portrays Anil’s investigative work in Guatemala, and she meets her lover in Montreal, where she attends a seminar. Most of the time, she works in a laboratory in America and is invited by other countries with the entire forensic team. By portraying Anil Tissera as having a transcultural background and a career that takes her across borders, Ondaatje emphasizes her diasporic and transnational qualities, ultimately depicting her as a character with a complex transnational identity in *Anil’s Ghost*.

Anil’s multicultural background is presented through her family members’ complicated cultural and national backgrounds. Ondaatje builds the family relationship for Anil, whose family members are scattered and dispersed, much like Ondaatje’s own family. There was a photograph of her swimming race “studied by every distant member of the family (those in Australia, Malaysia and England, as well as those on the island)” (2001: 9). When Ondaatje attempted to seek the origin, he found that in Sri Lanka, “Everyone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations..... when he was asked by one of the British governors what his nationality was ‘God alone knows, your excellency’” (Ondaatje, 1993: 32). The protagonist, Anil, transcends national and identity boundaries, and her lineage reflects a mixed heritage. Ondaatje deliberately crafts Anil with these boundary-crossing traits to challenge cultural homogeneity. The blurred and mixed nature of Anil’s identity is a subtle nod to the permeating and blending aspects of culture.

Welsch posits that the historical formation of a nation involves a mixture of various cultural elements, akin to the confluence of diverse springs, streams, and rivers that blend into a singular, dynamic current, dissolving the notion of cultural homogeneity (Welsch, 2010). Similarly, Dagnino contends that: “No great river would reach the ocean without being fed by tributaries: the brooks, streams, and rivulets that join its flow, often

bringing with them more water, alluvium, minerals, or fish than the source stream” (Dagnino, 2015: 34). Ondaatje’s ancestral lineage can be traced back to a Dutch doctor, and the scattered relatives of Anil further highlight the absence of cultural homogenization within a society. Ondaatje presents a perspective that rejects the notion of cultural uniformity and recognizes the intricate and diverse nature of cultural development by crafting characters like Anil who exist outside of traditional territorial boundaries.

#### IV. Transcultural Identity in *Anil’s Ghost*

Dagnino refers to “deterritorialized citizens” as a result of globalization as “neonomads” or “global nomads,” and writers with transcultural backgrounds are the most fitting representatives of this group because they are “less and less trapped in the traditional (im)migrant/exilic/diasporic syndrome and are more able instead to embrace the opportunities and the freedom that diversity and mobility now bestow upon them” (2015: 100). Therefore, they can “go beyond the culture in which they were born to transcend their ethnic, national, racial, or religious self-referentiality” (2015: 10). Building on the above conclusion, this paper probes into the identity of characters in *Anil’s Ghost* with the aim of exploring the impact of mobility on Ondaatje’s writing and the key aspects of transcultural identity in the novel.

##### 1. Deconstruction of “Home” and Self-chosen Belonging

At its most basic level, the term “home” means one’s place of birth or current residence. In a broader sense, home can refer to the geographical meaning at the national level. Following the emergence of dispersed literary criticism, there have been extensive discussions surrounding the spiritual notion of “home”, which argues that home is not solely defined in geographical terms but can also be elevated to a sense of spiritual belonging. For diaspora writers, home is a common narrative subject, and through the imagery of home, memories and identity are recovered from separation. In the postmodern diasporic environment, the sense of belonging and nostalgia triggers the desire to go home and the urge to return. As a result, diasporic subjects always try to establish a connection with their homeland and develop an imaginary view of their country and home. From a transcultural perspective, the large number of transnational migrant flows in the era of globalization, far from home in the geographical sense, experiencing shocks in their spiritual belonging. Nevertheless, this mobility can give rise to new transcultural groups --- neonomads. Dagnino characterizes this group as “a type of deterritorialized citizens ... referred to as ‘neonomads’ or ‘global nomads’ ... who appear to be flourishing due to the freedom and opportunities afforded by modern forms of mobility” (2015: 99). Diasporas are those who live outside their homeland, but still maintain a connection to their cultural roots through a transnational network or a transnational perspective on their national culture and history. In contemporary times, the notion of diaspora has assumed a futuristic connotation, owing to increased travel between an individual’s homeland and adopted land. Consequently, the feeling of despair and vulnerability that once characterized leaving one’s native country has diminished, as people traverse borders in a spiritual, cultural, and practical sense. Thus, the sense of alienation once associated with emigration is not as acute as it previously was.

When Anil came back to Sri Lanka, she had no family or friends on the island. Her parents had died in a car accident after she left the country, and her brother had left Sri Lanka too. “After she had left Sri Lanka at eighteen, her only real connection was the new sarong her parents sent her every Christmas (which she dutifully wore), and news clippings of swim meets” (2001: 8). Anil’s connection to Sri Lanka is primarily through her parents, and after their passing, this connection weakened. Due to the lack of close ties in Sri Lanka, Anil often sought emotional connections and close relationships with friends in America: “Rereading her girlfriend Leaf’s message from America made her feel better. Some communication from the West” (2001: 28). She often recalls her best friend Leaf in the United States, who suffers from a persistent disease, Alzheimer, and is gradually forgetting their past. “It was in the Arizona labs that Anil met and worked with a woman named Leaf. A few years older, Leaf became Anil’s closest friend and constant companion” (2001: 233). The emotional support of her lover, a married man and her past laboratory. In Sri Lanka, amidst an atmosphere of investigation and oppressive terror, Anil found solace in her intimate relationships and daily activities, which provided her with a sense of security and belonging during times of pain and loneliness.

Furthermore, when Anil came back in those first days in Colombo, she felt alone until her memories about her parents revived. "Those first days in Colombo it seemed she always found herself alone when the weather broke" (2001: 15). Sri Lanka's weather reminds her of her parents: "Years before her parents had given a dinner party. They had set up the long table in their parched and dry garden..... Then, towards the end of the meal, the rains began" (2001: 15). The rain in Colombo became the emotional link between her family and the present: "Suddenly Anil was glad to be back, the buried senses from childhood alive in her" (2001: 15). We cannot erase the innate conditions or genes in the formation of culture. Childhood and the original culture always exist even though it belongs to the past. "Auto-biographical factors relate to one's history personal experiences, relations, and memories which attach a particular person to a given place" (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004: 459). In general, a person's birthplace and upbringing often hold a central place in their life, and their native culture is typically viewed as the root and integral part of their identity as a diaspora. However, from a transcultural perspective, as demonstrated by Ondaatje's writing, the relationship between primary cultural identity and a sense of belonging may not be so immutable.

## 2. **Dispatriation: The Process of Transcending the Primary Culture**

Transcultural identity is a process of addition, not reduction and elimination. "That is how one can overcome one's national, ethnic, racial, or religious self-referentiality" (Dagnino, 2015: 100).

Anil left Sri Lanka and went abroad for medical school at eighteen. At first, "She had expected to feel alien in England only for a few weeks. ... But acceptance was harder than that, ... In her first month in London, she'd been constantly confused by the geography around her" (2001: 141). This was the first time for Anil to leave her homeland and she felt confused and unconformable in the strange environment. Or we can say she is learning how to deal with and absorb those cultural elements. Anil was charmed by a man from Sri Lanka and "she had begun loving him because of her loneliness.....That made a difference in the new, too brittle country" (2001: 141). She desperately needs to find solace in him from Sri Lanka, reminiscing with someone from her homeland in an unfamiliar cultural environment. "She could cook a curry with him. She could refer to a specific barber in Bambalapitiya, could whisper her desire for jaggery or jakfruit and be understood" (2001: 141). The couple married hastily, but their relationship eventually deteriorated due to sense of isolation and the need for comfort. Nevertheless, the woman was eventually liberated from the emotional distress and suffering caused by displacement. "When she did return, she fell in love with working at night, and sometimes she couldn't bear to leave the lab, just rested her happily tired dark head on the table" (2001: 145). And when he came back to Colombo, Anil began her process to recover from the trauma and confusion and embraced the British culture. "She no longer spoke Sinhala to anyone. She turned fully to the place". She has transcended her native or primary culture as the notion dispatriation describes:

Dispatriation represents the assertion of the writer's freedom from the ties of cultural affiliations and national traditions as well from all those traumatic and distressing feelings (nostalgia, estrangement, loss of memory, loss of one's sense of identity, loss of native language) generally associated with the migrating experience (Dagnino, 2006: 102).

The concept of "home" has evolved to encompass more than just one's geographical or cultural origins, but also includes emotional connections with family, friends, colleagues, and those who share similar interests and passions. Rather than a hierarchical dependence, the sense of belonging is now based on co-dependencies and mutual ethical relations. Furthermore, identity formation is no longer solely reliant on factors such as ethnicity, nationality, or religious affiliation, as individuals are free to make their own choices and establish connections with different cultures. The deconstruction of the concept of "home" allows us to review our belonging sense which can be seen as a fluid and plural concept. The story of Anil serves as an example of the fluidity of identity and the concept of belonging, illustrating how these notions can evolve and change over time. Despite establishing a connection with British culture, her self-identity and resilience shaped by her upbringing in Sri Lanka continue to forge her worldview. Anil's transcultural identity is not a reduction, but rather an expansion of her sense of self. As a teenager, she enjoyed swimming with some success, and although she stopped swimming after leaving Sri Lanka for the Western world, the sense of discovery she felt while swimming



has survived in her studies and working life. There is often a sense of loss and disconnection when leaving one's roots and hometown, but as Welsch argues, a sense of localization and hometown may still be necessary. It is possible to establish a sense of home in new environments and through new connections, while still acknowledging and respecting one's cultural and personal history (2001). We may need a localization, a hometown. Nevertheless, home is not necessarily where one is born and grow up. One can find the true home far from one's birthplace. Hence, in *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje always calls himself a foreigner, a Canadian born in Sri Lanka. As a transcultural writer, he re-examines the relationship between himself and Sri Lanka and chooses his homeland without having it imposed on him by birth or incidental circumstances. As Dagnino says: "Simultaneously we belong to everything and nothing" (2015: 32). Ondaatje emotionally belongs to Sri Lanka and Canada, but not only to these two countries, with a sense of ambivalence as Ondaatje says: "I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner" (1993: 68).

Epstein introduces a new form of freedom: freedom from reliance on one's native culture, where one was born and educated. *Anil's Ghost* acknowledges that diaspora is no longer bound by the homesickness syndrome but can instead choose a home where they have developed relationships and attachment, which ultimately leads to the abandonment of the limitations of one's given cultural identity and the expansion of one's complexity through the accumulation of multiple selves. While primary identity plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's sense of self, Epstein has criticized the idea that primary identity and belonging are inextricably linked, arguing that a sense of belonging can become a prison if it locks an individual into their primary identity. He asserts that: "I am willing to accept my identity at the beginning of my journey, but I do not agree to remain with it until the end of my life, to be an animal representing the tag on its cage" (Epstein, 2009: 341). Anil has gone through a process of transcending her primary cultural identity, and similarly, Ondaatje has also experienced transpatriation and developed his own cultural identity outside of his primary culture. "The individual is now able to escape the restrictions and essentializing elements imposed by every single culture and access the right to be free from the conditioning and the dependencies of any given, native, or primary culture, thus reaching a full transcultural condition" (Dagnino, 2015: 127). Anil and Ondaatje are both transcultural individuals who have shed the restrictions of their given cultural identities and their dependence on any single culture. As a result, they have become more complex, accumulating multiple selves.

## V. Conclusion

*Anil's Ghost* engages and expresses the fluid, permeating and blending nature of culture. Ondaatje's resistance to the traditional homogeneous culture narratives is self-evident in his texts. Anxiety of rootlessness is a syndrome resulting from cultural homogenization and the seeking for pure national culture, fictional and constructed. Silva states, "The need for inhabiting multiple identity ties debunks the nationalist/fundamentalist assertion of a homogeneous national self that seeks to erase divisions, contradictions and diversity. Ethnic classification and racial divisions are shown to be meaningless" (2002: 82). Thus, through portraying Anil's deterritoriality and transcultural identity, Ondaatje has developed a new perspective on culture, liberating from the anxiety of rootlessness and forming a positive mindset that benefits from mobility. Ondaatje's transcultural narrative challenges conventional view of culture and identity, revealing the contradictions and conflicts that arise in the age of global mobility. The transcultural perspective offers an alternative to global homogenization, emphasizing the importance of cultural integration and penetration, liberating individuals from dependence on their native cultures. We are not in an intercultural zone, but in a space that transcends all cultures, a cultural space of great generative momentum where culture draws its forward momentum from all cultures and where individuals have the freedom to choose to cultivate their cultural identity.

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