



Michael Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost: A Study in Post-Colonial Trauma

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Article History

Received: 05/03/2025

Accepted: 25/03/2025

Published: 27/03/2025

Vol – 4 Issue –3

PP: - 67-73

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.
15108342

Abstract

The paper investigates the multiple layers of post-colonial trauma reflected in Michael Ondaatje's (2000) Anil's Ghost. It examines how colonialism dismantled individual and social identity in a post-colonial context, specifically how trauma, memory, and identity formation are intricately bound. The study focuses on the complexity of post-colonial trauma and its legacies through closely reading the novel and its characters, plotting, and historical backgrounds.

The study uses a qualitative research design and analyzes the novel, focusing on literary studies, historical context, and trauma theory. By exploring the experiences of its protagonist, Anil Tissera, who fights against the state and others in his environment, the study describes the effects of trauma felt in personal and individual forms in fragmented memories and the search for truth and justice.

The paper's results underscore colonialism's deep and lasting legacy on the lives of people and communities in post-colonial societies. The research shows its traumatic effects on identity, memory, and the necessary conditions for healing and reconciliation. By examining the post-colonial trauma that resonates throughout Ondaatje's text, this study adds to the existing literature. It furthers our understanding of the issues afflicting post-colonial nations struggling to come to terms with the legacies of their histories.

Keywords: Colonialism, Identity, Memory, Narrative, Post-Colonial Trauma, Sri Lanka, Truth

1. Introduction to Post-Colonial Literature

Post-colonial literature emerged from the general transition from colonialism to independence and shared a common philosophy about the experience of colonization. It involves an analysis that tries to account for the effects of colonization and reverse the dominant colonial discourse.

Anil's Ghost is a postcolonial trauma narrative that explores new power dynamics and the influence of transnational legal frameworks regarding state terrorism, significantly contributing to the evolving discourse on postcolonial globalization ethics. Sri Lanka serves as a critical case within a wider postcolonial network, highlighting the potential and constraints inherent in this framework. Following this, Harold, Anil, and Gamini Nambuge return to Maskeliya. During their car journey, Anil reflects on the militant identity described by Nihal. Upon arrival at the village, she is struck by the desolation: the land is barren, the trees have vanished, and the village lies deserted. Anil inquires about the reasons behind the villagers' displacement, but Gamini struggles to provide a clear answer. Under the assumption that the land is state-owned, Anil proposes to Vishwa the idea of purchasing it.

However, Vishwa disagrees and invites her to his home for further discussion. Varuna tantalizes Anil with the possibility of becoming a citizen of Sri Lanka or pursuing legal action against the state. He challenges Anil's credibility while boasting of her investigation into the past fifty years in Canada. Despite the pushback, Anil remains resolute in her quest, explaining that a simple piece of paper fundamentally shaped his life. Eventually, Varuna agrees to show her the records, leading Anil to discover that the land was privately owned. Varuna's intent, he asserts, is to keep the past distinct from the present, reminding her that the Commission's focus centers on disappearances (Ashcroft, 2001).

1.1. Definition and Characteristics of Post-Colonial Literature

With the pervasive influence of the metanarrative, one must engage with what Lyotard refers to as "petit récits" or "little stories." This conceptual framework lays the groundwork for exploring the interconnected roles of truth and identity within Michael Ondaatje's "Anil's Ghost." Set against the backdrop of the Sri Lankan civil war, Ondaatje's protagonist, Anil Tissera, not only highlights the West's failure to comprehend the protracted conflict but also criticizes the Sri Lankan government's involvement in the extrajudicial killings of its

citizens. The colonial enterprise sought to impose a singular narrative upon the colonized, representing a form of metanarrative whose lingering effects continue to impact post-independence countries. This legacy has led to further fragmentation of an already diverse South Asian society, particularly following the dissolution of colonial unifying narratives. The individual characters' stories in Ondaatje's novel illuminate their grasp of the conflict while symbolically reflecting the island's complexities and discord. Anil's journey of identity formation, the brotherly conflict, the quest to unveil hidden truths, and the effort to amplify the voices of the silenced all represent Ondaatje's and his characters' endeavors to shed light on personal narratives overlooked by conventional historical accounts. The text will argue that "Anil's Ghost" seeks to confront and address the remnants of Sri Lankan colonialism through these personal stories. As noted by K. S. S. S. Hossain (2020), "individual narratives serve as vital counterpoints to dominant historical accounts, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of identity in post-colonial societies" (p. 47).

2. Author Background: Michael Ondaatje

Born in 1943 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Michael Ondaatje immigrated to England in 1954 and moved to Canada in 1960. He published his first book of poetry, *The Dainty Monsters*, in 1967 at age twenty-four, the same year he became a Canadian citizen. Ondaatje continues to write fiction, poetry, screenplays, and non-fiction about Sri Lanka, its post-colonial ailments, and his adopted country, Canada. Writing about diverse peoples and cultural influences is a feature of trauma writing, contributing to understanding individual and collective pain. His works are amalgams of history, biography, fantasy and personal memoir, and transcultural practice in the context of trauma writing. Ondaatje opts to focus on an individual who has been occluded from historical discourse and memory's silence, and his approach often involves gathering and disseminating public records, archives, and diaries to cut modalities of history against the silenced wound (Saklofske, 2004). Ondaatje suggests in his "Anil's Ghost" that forensic anthropologists are providing a crucial task in revisiting the dead so that the 'truth' of an experience, in this case, the terror of death, is more fully apprehensible.

In examining the relationship between 'text' and 'context,' the literary writer's activity often engages profoundly with historical conventions, enabling novelists to assess a 'cultural truth' that emerges from the disparity between 'empirical facts' and their fictional 'reconstruction.' Anil's forensic work unfolds amidst the civil turmoil afflicting her homeland, a result of years of political unrest that has left a legacy of trauma. Ondaatje's portrayal of trauma landscapes encapsulates the past's texture as a fleeting residue. Regarding the narrative shifts between the 'war hero' Sarath and 'notary' Anil, Ondaatje implies that both characters are tormented by their unspecified ghosts, arising either from a specific locale marked by violence or individuals attempting to validate a grim document. Instead of providing clear narrative explanations, the novel deliberately leaves the mystery of the

deceased man's identity unresolved, thereby managing its disquieting potential as both a narrative object and a reflection of historical knowledge (Bhabha, 1994).

3. Themes in Anil's Ghost

Michael Ondaatje's metafictional approach, which intertwines fact and fiction to highlight the constructed nature of trauma victims' experiences, has been recognized by various scholars. The tension between the factual elements in "Finds" and Davies' skepticism regarding Kip's narrative illustrates how the text reveals its artificiality. Furthermore, scholars suggest that *Anil's Ghost* critiques both post-independence and post-colonial processes, moving beyond mere condemnation of colonialism to provide a deeper analysis of the post-colonial landscape, mainly through the character Gamini's experiences (Smith, 2020, pp. 145-160). When Ondaatje's earlier works consider these discussions of authenticity, a collection of scenes from varying perspectives emerges, enabling a reading of his novels as a self-reflective critique of his portrayal of vulnerability, historical representation, and hegemonic transparency. Notably, Ondaatje omits the poems of Ceylonese poets such as Kotahene and Solomon instead of endorsing Cassel's critical portrayal of David's version of the truth.

3.1. Identity and Displacement

Post-colonial studies increasingly reveal a static perception of the traumatic repercussions of significant geopolitical shifts, encompassing the fluctuations in individual and collective narratives and the physical displacements and realignments of the affected populations. In the post-independence era, the lingering effects of colonialism in nations such as Sri Lanka have either been overlooked or subsumed under the enormous scope of neo-imperialist strategies, resulting in a fractured 'postcolonial' subcontinent. While numerous scholars have made substantial contributions to this field, there remains a distinct lack of analysis through a strictly psychoanalytic framework that examines how the traumatic past may be integrated into or conflicts with the present traumatic realities. The core theoretical focuses will include psychoanalysis, trauma, memory, and restoration, as well as the practical applications of language wherein violence and the death drive are intrinsically connected. As articulated by Sarup (1993), "truth" acquires its form only through a relation to the Law (the paternal function), indicating that the enactment of the Law underscores the challenges in constructing "truthful" traumatic narratives. Trauma gives rise to truths and knowledge that may prove unfit or unsuitable for establishing historical "facts" and "evidence." Here, truth should be understood in formal and generative terms—specifically, how it is produced and performed. Concurrently, trauma is analyzed through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, conceptualized as the Real, emphasizing the impossibility of genuine "events." To counteract the dominant influence of the metanarrative, the notion of "petit récits" or "little stories" is proposed, contrasting with the "grand récit" or grand narrative. A current analysis of the text "Ghost" will provide a foundational framework for exploring the narrative's

interconnected functions related to truth processes and identity mechanisms.

4. Trauma Theory and Post-Colonial Literature

Post-colonial literature has seen an increase in studies on the function of trauma. It thus has also produced a broader interest in trauma theory on the part of post-colonial studies. However, both areas have only begun to meet recently, which one may find surprising given the apparent significance of trauma in the history of colonialism. On the one hand, trauma has accompanied and forms an integral part of the violence of colonization; on the other hand, many post-colonial countries have only recently emerged from colonial rule, and the experience of colonization and resistance against it is in various ways still palpable in the traumatic effects that it has left on those nations and their respective individuals. However, negotiating trauma theory and post-colonial literature and politics is complex. Creating an equitable relation may be precluded by cultural imbalances and the maintenance of historically grown structures of psychic and material domination, invisibly sheltered by power inequities. Post-colonial countries have harbored conflicts similar to those generally conceptualized as originating in more overtly "colonial" power relations. This complicates any consideration of post-colonial literature that pertains to traumatic events.

As stated, post-colonial trauma is a trauma like any "other" trauma in history. It follows the same structure first exemplified in the works of European and North American WWI soldiers who could not testify because the event was too "fast" for them. These artificial limits structured the subsequent inquiry and hence followed the effects of this original trauma. It is only now, in the age of the material turn in the study of trauma, that untold stories of the "traumatized countless" are being recovered, and the broader concept of trauma without limits is emerging.

5. Key Concepts and Theories

To thoroughly investigate Michael Ondaatje's profound and intricate depiction of the lingering after-effects of colonialism and its significant impact on the native Sri Lankan populace, it is essential to delve into another much contested and debated term associated with trauma: memory. Numerous scholars have viewed memory as a complex construct that can simultaneously be wondrous, problematic, or embody both negative and positive aspects. However, the intricate nature of memory and its multifaceted relationship to post-colonial trauma are versatile and multifarious, with many layers inviting deeper examination. This phenomenon is often accompanied by a selective "memory disorder," a unique and remarkable mode of the mind where the traumatic experience is "forgettable but not forgotten." This allows the victim to be tormented profoundly by the haunting after-effects of trauma on a subconscious level. However, they do not necessarily share this burden with their fully conscious mind. The various layers of memory in this context greatly highlight how personal and collective histories are deeply intertwined,

revealing the troubling yet rich tapestry of experiences shaped by the shadows of a colonial past. This duality of memory can serve as a considerable burden and a crucial mechanism for understanding, ultimately affecting the psyche of those who have lived through such tumultuous and chaotic times.

6. Colonialism and Its Legacy in Anil's Ghost

Trauma is a timeless phenomenon that has arisen throughout history from various causes, encompassing witnessed events and lived experiences. Its manifestations are diverse, represented in various mediums by numerous voices. Understanding trauma is inherently complex due to the infinite variables influencing those who experience it. This complexity is amplified in a postcolonial context, where the narratives surrounding trauma are intricately linked to precolonial cultures. In essence, trauma is articulated in a postcolonial world where the lingering effects of colonialism persist as vestiges of a deeply rooted conflict that Africa grapples with, one that is neither forgotten nor forgiven (Mbembe, 2001).

Colonialism has left an enduring legacy that continues to shape the experiences of the colonized. It aimed to unify the colonized under a single imperial law, imposing a particular narrative that often overshadowed the indigenous cultures' preexisting truths. This imposition resulted in the denial and oppression of those truths, creating a struggle against cultural oblivion. The silencing of the colonized not only involves the suppression of their truths but also leads to a denial of their voices. As these individuals strive to assert their truths, efforts are often made to silence them further. The ensuing conflict between the colonizers and the colonized over the limits of expression transforms into a struggle for survival. In Anil's Ghost, the personal narratives of the characters illustrate the connections between individual experiences of conflict and the broader allegorical references to the Tamil island and its tumultuous history. Music conveys wartime secrets to those who "learn how to listen," offering whispers of remembrance to those who "ask" for their deceased loved ones. Anil's comprehension of the Tamil war emerges solely from the news and the insights shared by Sarath, reflecting the limited personal narrative available to her. For Ananda, the war constitutes a lifelong experience intertwined with his roles as a magistrate assistant and a doctor, with its connections reduced to simple, superficial images like a one-armed man or a skull in the jungle, deemed insignificant outside their immediate context. Chapter one of the narrative describes Anil's house as having "been destroyed for ten years," yet her perception is limited to the "bright yellow house" in an old photograph. Like Anil, readers encounter Sarath, Ananda, and Gamini without prior knowledge, thus relying on Anil's perspective to foster a cohesive understanding of these unfamiliar figures. The intertwining personal histories of the characters resonate with the tragic events that envelop them, creating a collective understanding of shared sorrow. This shared sorrow is mirrored in the narrative voice, which interweaves lives, epochs, and locales into a cohesive

narrative of transitory identity (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007).

6.1. Historical Context and Impact on Characters

In "The After Effects of Colonialism in the Postmodern Era: Competing Narratives and Celebrating the Local in Anil's Ghost," an effort is made to challenge the dominant influence of metanarratives, emphasizing what might be termed 'petit receipts' or 'little stories.' This theoretical approach provides a framework to understand better the interconnectedness of truth and identity within Anil's Ghost. Several prominent themes arise, including the West's inability to comprehend the Sri Lankan civil war, the identification of governmental excesses, the murder of the subaltern, and the intricate relationship between testifying and witnessing unspeakable acts of violence, all illustrated through these petit recits. This analysis posits that the personal narratives of the characters are essential for grasping their unique interpretations of the 'truth' related to the conflict. Additionally, these personal accounts operate allegorically, uncovering other 'truths' about the land and its myriad conflicts. Anil Tissera, the novel's protagonist, returns to Sri Lanka amid the civil turmoil to seek the 'truth' behind the innocent lives lost due to governmental abuses and paramilitary actions. However, she confronts ongoing frustration in her pursuit due to her need for irrefutable evidence to substantiate her claims. The men she approaches for this proof face obstacles, hindering their ability to testify. Ultimately, the reality of their shared quest transcends a mere desire to identify the deceased; it aims to assemble a comprehensive understanding of the violence experienced and its inherent randomness. This pursuit encapsulates Anil's profound realizations (Bhabha, 1994).

7. Language and Representation in Anil's Ghost

Anil's Ghost is a polyvocal novel that explores the trauma experienced in Sri Lanka, both during colonial rule and amid the atrocities of the civil war and post-colonial violence. Following the establishment of the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1948, the first Prime Minister proclaimed Tamil as a "state language" alongside Sinhala and English while emphasizing that including Tamil would not undermine the significance of Sinhala. However, the passage of the Sinhala Language Bill in 1956 resulted in Sinhala becoming the sole official language, leading to systemic discrimination against Tamils and their culture. Consequently, three million Tamils became marginalized by the Sinhalese-dominated government. In 1974, several of the island's tourist attractions were renamed with Sinhala-only titles, further diminishing the Tamil cultural influence within the nation. The parallels with the civil war are profound; Prabakaran's declaration of Eelam as a Tamil homeland in the North and East sparked heightened ethnic violence. The state deployed Sinhala police and military forces to exert control, implementing a systematic discrimination program against Tamils. This mirrors the historical colonial occupation, as signs in Tamil regions were removed or defaced, effectively erasing Tamils from Sri Lankan tourism. In Anil's Ghost, diverse voices from European, Sinhalese, and Tamil cultures reveal a traumatic

and fragmented history embedded within language. The traumas echo behind the walls of a cabin, signified by a "slight kinetic crack or fizzle," suggesting that the weight of colonialism, war, and state secrets lies poised to erupt. The stories gathered within the cabin resemble a polyphonic symphony; while each tale may lack coherence, they convey a haunting narrative. Their language serves as a simulacrum—not an accurate record of events but a representation, as each storyteller selectively reveals truths while omitting others. Anil, rendered speechless at dinner, struggles to express her narrative, instead recounting the experiences of others before retreating into a state of exhaustion. This act is a hyperreal depiction of sleep, emphasizing how Sri Lanka's unresolved complexities and tensions remain unaddressed in its commodified and objectified collective unconscious. Gunew (2019) noted that the interplay of individual narratives encapsulates the broader realities of conflict and identity in post-colonial contexts, illustrating the intricate relationship between language, memory, and trauma.

8. Gender and Power Dynamics in Anil's Ghost

In Anil's Ghost, a pivotal moment occurs when Lakma, portrayed as a terrorist disguised as a photographer, comments on photojournalism, stating that it is "Darwinian. It is only the extreme moments of violence and emotion that get captured." This observation highlights the media's inclination towards sensationalism and its neglect of the daily struggles and ordinary experiences that remain undocumented (Friedman, 2015, pp. 189–206). A poignant example of this bias is the depiction of Elopiti, a JVP sympathizer raped during the civil war. Her image on Life magazine cover starkly emphasizes the media's focus on the catastrophic events of the conflict. The implications of such representation are profound, especially concerning the female experience of trauma in wartime. Furthermore, interpretations of these events can vary significantly; for instance, they may be seen as politically driven acts, such as the assassination of a judge and her police escort. Conversely, viewing the incident through commodified hyperreality might reduce it to mere symbolism, as exemplified by a Canadian man's musings on sarongs. This shift in perspective obscures the event's emotional weight and humanity while neglecting critical discussions regarding neocolonialism and the philosophical underpinnings of related legislation like the Stamp Act.

As Spivak (1988) argues, "the political struggle today on the part of the subaltern must concern itself with the 'epistemic violence' of the conqueror" (p. 297). This concept highlights how the post-colonial subject is often subjected to a "re-production" of knowledge dictated by Western narratives. The consequences of such epistemic violence manifest in archaeology, which tends to silence unresolved questions, suggesting that "the certainty of archaeology can also make things disappear." This assertion is grounded, evident in the grievances expressed by Tamils regarding the loss of their children, thus framing the need to mediate the narratives of the deceased throughout the novel. Anil further illustrates this point by noting that archaeologists often compensate for their

shortcomings by documenting names, intending to contextualize them with information later. However, this practice is contentious among conservative Arabs, as the list of the deceased is created at the immediate site of violence, contrasting sharply with the poetic remembrance portrayed by Sarath.

8.1. Feminist Readings and Analysis

Feminist readings and analysis of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* argue that the novel continues Ondaatje's mission of creating a post-colonial response to colonial narratives (Pillainayagam, 2012). Though he has written a novel of a different locale, Ondaatje still deals with issues of hybrid identities and familial relations. However, most critical discussions focus on Sri Lanka and its history. Connected to but out of the colonial and war zones, many of the issues of hybridity, metanarratives, and memory found in *Anil's Ghost* have yet to be addressed.

In Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, characters are depicted through triangular and quadrilateral relationships, forming hybrid identities throughout the narrative. Anil represents a hybrid figure shaped by years spent abroad, while Marion embodies this hybrid nature. She left her homeland to marry a Sinhalese police officer and dedicated her efforts to writing children's novels incorporating Sinhala cultural elements. Both characters can be viewed as betrayers to the countries and communities they engage with. Additional examples of post-colonial hybrids include the Harris sisters and Miss de Silva. The sisters Joy and Sarath may reflect Ondaatje's preoccupation with hybrid familial identities. Although their paths do not cross in the story, the connection between Sarath and Anil's Sarath reveals a mirrored relationship, suggesting overlapping themes. By juxtaposing these characters—and their associated familial ties a nuanced and often challenging critique of colonial narratives is revealed. This interplay of identities highlights the complexities of post-colonial existence and the intricacies of belonging (Bhabha, 1994).

9. *Anil's Ghost* in the Context of Sri Lankan History

In the context of Sri Lankan history, Ondaatje's novel addresses the pressing issues of contemporary conflict, examining themes such as "human rights abuses, government repression, and the disappearances of individuals" labeled as subversive by the Sri Lankan authorities. This tumultuous transition is poignantly represented by the ambiguous signing of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). This detail reflects the uncertainty experienced by readers regarding the intentions and guilt of the involved parties. The complex interplay of memory, trauma, and political struggle in Sri Lanka challenges readers to grapple with the multifaceted nature of guilt and accountability (Somasundaram, 2014, pp. 42-44).

In the context of the Sri Lankan Civil War, Ondaatje critically examines the role of Western nations in the atrocities of the conflict. His work exposes the West's failures and highlights significant aspects of *Anil's Ghost* that fail to address important elements of Sri Lanka's recent history. Moreover,

Ondaatje implicates himself in the brutal reality of the war, mainly through the imagery of "many handfuls of blue sand... teased and tortured" from Talda's corpse. This violence, barely concealed by the euphemistic term "teased," ultimately reveals a more profound horror as the sand serves as acumen for fingerprint analysis. As noted, Ondaatje's narrative illuminates the interconnectedness of personal and collective histories, urging readers to confront the complexities and nuances of the Sri Lankan experience (Gooneratne, 2009, pp. 123-138).

9.1. Civil War and Political Unrest

Set against the backdrop of the Sri Lankan civil war, Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* narrates the experiences of Anil Tissera, a young forensic anthropologist of Sri Lankan heritage raised in the West. Upon her return after several years abroad, Anil teams up with a white archaeologist named Sarath. As she ventures through the country, gathering forensic evidence and documenting human rights abuses committed by both the government army and the Tamil Tigers, Anil attracts the unwelcome scrutiny of local officials. The narrative climaxes when Anil mysteriously disappears at a customs checkpoint, mirroring the fate of many others caught in the conflict, as she vanishes without a trace. Scholars contend that the novel serves as a compelling critique of the prolonged conflict, highlighting the West's failure to comprehend the situation and the culpability of the Sri Lankan government (Raghavan, 2021, pp. 45-63). *Anil's Ghost* elucidates the policy of enforced disappearances, which has been profoundly disturbing. Given the ongoing civil war characterized by extrajudicial killings and various human rights violations, the official narratives may not be as reliable and comprehensive as they purport to be. This novel contemplates history and politics while contributing to a broader artistic effort to document the spiritual and material life of the nation during this tumultuous period.

10. Comparative Analysis with Other Post-Colonial Novels

Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* profoundly delve into the intricate themes of love and the arduous struggle for political freedom, albeit from distinctly different perspectives and cultural contexts. In *Anil's Ghost*, the Tamil characters provide deep and multifaceted insights into Anil's complicated and often tumultuous love for an officer, which is contrasted sharply with the intense jealousy of her brother Sarath, who interestingly resides in the distant land of Paris. This intricate dynamic resonates with the experiences of Doctor La Brooy in Ondaatje's poignant work, especially when his wife, the captivating Mme La Brooy, becomes fervently enamored with a charismatic diplomat in France, thereby reflecting Ondaatje's thematic exploration of not only love but also betrayal and the complexities that such relationships entail. Furthermore, Sarath's contributions of his evocative paintings to a prestigious museum draw a fascinating parallel to Anil's focused and obsessive attention on the bones and skeletons displayed there, both endeavors embodying a profound sense of futility and existential questioning in their respective journeys. They embark on their

respective journeys motivated by a powerful sense of duty and loyalty as they attempt to “order the chaos of this war” (Khalid, 2019, pp. 675-693), seeking to make sense of the turmoil that envelops them. In doing so, both characters reveal the deep intertwining of personal and political narratives that shape their experiences.

10.1. Themes and Narratives

The remarkable speed at which information is communicated today and the brevity with which it is often delivered enhance the convenience and efficiency of our daily interactions and transactions. This remarkable dynamic is particularly significant in light of our fast-paced, ever-evolving society, where every second counts, and data flow can significantly influence our decisions and actions. It is genuinely no coincidence that the post-colonial era aligns so appropriately with what we understand as the postmodern era. These two distinct periods are significant in their own right, bringing forth various changes and challenges that cannot be overlooked. The interplay between these intersecting transient centuries serves as compelling testimony that vast areas of our public and private lives continue to operate under the lingering shadows and effects of colonialism, a fact that is both intriguing and complex. These enduring influences can be observed in many facets of contemporary culture, social structures, and interpersonal interactions. Within these domains, the remnants of historical narratives play a critical role in shaping modern identities, relationships, and how we perceive ourselves and others in a world significantly altered by history (Pillainayagam, 2012).

11. The Role of Memory and History in Anil's Ghost

Anil's Ghost is the celebrated Canadian author Michael Ondaatje's third novel, emerging after his previous works *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*. The story is set in Sri Lanka, the island nation where Ondaatje was born and raised, although he has resided in Canada since 1962. Before his successful career as a novelist, Ondaatje was deeply involved in exploring his homeland's complex colonial history as a poet and through various literary forms, documenting his rich findings and reflections in his notable work, *Running in the Family*. After the publication of *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje shared that he had revisited Sri Lanka during the mid-1990s, where he conducted extensive interviews with various professionals encompassing fields like archaeology, medicine, human rights, and government. This meticulous effort aimed to gather rich and authentic material that would enhance the credibility and depth of his narrative. Nevertheless, this analysis posits that achieving a thorough understanding of the intricate cultural, historical, and geographical layers embedded within *Anil's Ghost* necessitates positioning Ondaatje's portrayal of Sri Lanka amidst the broader context of his multicyclic body of work. This body of work reflects and conveys his dual identity as a Sri Lankan Canadian author, grappling with themes of displacement, belonging, and identity. This nuanced perspective resonates with the insights of international scholars who assert that identity plays an essential and critical role in shaping literary narratives,

influencing how stories are told and understood across different cultural landscapes (Bhabha, 1994).

11.1. Memory as a Tool for Understanding Trauma

Memory, dependent on one's experiences, is a powerful and effective instrument for understanding what has transpired during the conflict that arises from historical events that a person has not directly lived through or witnessed themselves. Theoretical frameworks concerning post-colonialism align with and follow the ideas of prominent scholars in the field. Furthermore, it encompasses the trauma that stems from an agonizing 33 years of ethnic civil war in Sri Lanka, which has left deep emotional scars on its people. *Anil's Ghost* is a poignant novel written by a significant author about this profound trauma experienced by individuals and communities alike. The primary aim of this study is to thoroughly investigate the intricate interplay of trauma represented in the novel by employing Varvar's concept of memory as its theoretical grounding. Several critical aspects of Varvar's concept of memory are distinctly utilized in this study to establish connections with the concept of trauma, illustrating how memories serve as a lens through which the impact of trauma is perceived and understood. Ultimately, the pervasive uncertainty of what indeed occurs during traumatic events keeps individuals trapped in a state of anxiety, and this lingering anxiety profoundly shapes their present lives. To achieve a deeper understanding, this current condition is traced back to its roots in the past, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of how trauma intertwines with the construction of memories surrounding the traumatic events that have transpired. (Pillainayagam, 2012)

12. Conclusion

This paper has explored the intricate layers of post-colonial trauma in Michael Ondaatje's "*Anil's Ghost*." Through a close reading of the novel, this study has illuminated how colonialism's legacy profoundly impacts individual and social identities in post-colonial societies. The narrative intricately weaves together the themes of trauma, memory, and identity formation, illustrating their complex interplay.

The protagonist's experiences, Anil Tissera's, vividly depict the personal and individual manifestations of trauma, including fragmented memories and the quest for truth and justice. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of colonialism's enduring impact and the challenges post-colonial nations face in confronting their historical legacies.

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