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Look into My Eyes: Subalternity and Physicallity in Michael Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost

In Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" She maintains that no the subaltern cannot speak. This is because the subaltern's identity has been constructed and shaped by western ideologies, and there is no space outside of Western ideology for the Subaltern to speak from. Because of colonialism, the subaltern has been separated from their history and culture and attempts to recover and reclaim a history and culture before colonialism fail because of the existing influence of colonialism and neocolonialism. Michael Ondaatje in his novel Anil's Ghost implies that the subaltern can speak. However, speaking means something different for Ondaatje than it does for Spivak. For Spivak for the Subaltern to speak, subalterns must unite and form a collective voice and identity which can be spoken and received on the global stage. The subaltern must also be free from the colonial forces that are trying to speak for it. For Ondaatje speaking means subalterns creating some sort of meaning and identity for themselves in the midst of colonial violence and this meaning can only be created and communicated on the local level. Also, for Ondaatje this speaking can best happen on the physical level because this is an identity which is fragmentary, and can not be fully articulated in oral or written language because of the forces trying to suppress and control subaltern identity and understandings of history.

Anil's Ghost Centers around Anil, a Forensic Anthropologist, who is from Sir Lanka but has been educated in and has spent much of her adult life in the West. She is sent by the United Nations to investigate political murders. She finds the skeletal remains of a man who was clearly murdered by the government. She feels if she could speak for this skeleton, the ultimate unspeakable subaltern, she can speak for the entire nation of Sir Lanka and articulate the violence of the Sir Lankan Civil War. However, she fails in her attempts to speak for this subaltern figure. The only way she gets close to understanding other subaltern figures and her own subaltern identity, which she has repressed, is in her relationships with others. In these relations, Ondaatje focuses on physical interactions. These physical interactions are not sexual but involve looking and touching the body. This interaction forms an emotional connection that cannot be expressed verbally. As the characters interact physically they are able to create personal identities and histories that combine art and reality in ways meaningful to the individual. These identities are fragmentary, recognize the influence of colonial violence and maintain that the subaltern can speak even when enmeshed in the colonial and neocolonial system, but this is a body language that the global community does not understand nor accept. Michael Ondaatje in Anil's Ghost makes it clear that it is detrimental to our scholarship to ignore the

physicality of the subaltern and fictional representations of the subaltern. Sometimes physical communication and understanding is possible when verbal communication is not.