

“THIS SWEET TOUCH”: ALIENATION AND PHYSICAL CONNECTION IN
THE WORKS OF MICHAEL ONDAATJE, SHYAM SELVADURAI, AND
SALMAN RUSHDIE

A Dissertation

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

SCOTT MITCHELL

Dr. Karen Piper, Dissertation Supervisor

AUGUST 2010

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

“THIS SWEET TOUCH”: ALIENATION AND PHYSICAL CONNECTION IN
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SALMAN RUSHDIE

presented by Scott Mitchell,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy of English,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Karen Piper

Professor Elaine Lawless

Professor Anand Prahlad

Professor Joanna Hearne

Professor Richard Callahan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the generous support I received from the University of Missouri in general and from specific individuals. Karen Piper has been a superb advisor through all stages of the Dissertation. She first introduced me to Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and suggested research material that was extremely useful. She has been most helpful in the drafting and revision stages. She has read several drafts of this dissertation and has given me beneficial feedback

Elaine Lawless has also been a valuable mentor from the beginning of my master's program at the University of Missouri to the end of my Ph.D. program. It was through conversations with her that I was able to formulate my dissertation topic. I would also like to acknowledge the remaining members of my dissertation: Anand Prahlad, Joanna Hearne, and Richard Callahan. This dissertation had its genesis from a comprehensive exam question I answered using *Anil's Ghost* and the discussion and feedback on that question I received from my committee members during my oral exams.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai, and Rushdie in their fiction present experiencing moments of mutual recognition instigated by physical connection as a possible means of ameliorating the alienating and Othering effects of Western colonialist discourse as profligated through labeling. The works studied—Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and *The English Patient*, Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, and Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* and *Midnight’s Children*—suggest that, despite the demise of colonialism, Western colonialist discourse still alienates nonwestern people from themselves and their communities, often through the process of naming. The writers discussed depict the mutual recognition of each other’s subjectivity by two characters as a means of lessening this alienation.

Together, these authors force us to question the prevalent focus on the verbal and the pessimism prevalent in much of postcolonial literature and theory. True, Western discourse continues to alienate and Other. But despite the negative influence of colonialist and neocolonialist discourses, Ondaatje, Selvadurai, and Rushdie illustrate in their fiction the possibility that individuals still retain some agency and avenues for ethic relationships with others and that these avenues are rooted in reciprocal recognition and physical connection.

Introduction

Bodies without Voice. Postcolonial theorists have long documented the negative impacts of colonial discourse on the bodies of the colonized, including turning bodies into voiceless objects of analysis for the colonizer. According to Merete Falck Borch et. al.: “Colonization separates spirit, mind and body of those colonized and, even when it does not enslave the bodies, turns them into objects. The constitutive problem of colonial discourse is the misrepresentation of ‘othered’ bodies deprived of voice” (xxvi). As the colonized are turned into the Other for the colonizer, they are in turn alienated from themselves and others. Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* discusses how the writings of European humanists, politicians, soldiers, and ministers contributed to the creation of a discourse that objectified indigenous populations and thus excused and legitimized Europeans’ colonialism and barbarism. Césaire’s arguments about discourse are similar to Foucault’s who claims that discourse is “the medium which constitutes power and through which it is exercised—[it] ‘constructs’ the objects of its knowledge” (Moore-Gilbert 36). In short, these theorists argue that discourse is created by those with power and is often used to assert that power over the powerless.

According to Patrick Williams and Laura Christman, colonial forms of knowledge have continued post-Independence in postcolonial nations. They claim that studying the effects of colonial forms of knowledge “involves an understanding of present circumstances as well as the ways in which these are informed by, perpetuate and differ from situations which preceded them, and the complex interrelations of history and the present moment provides the terrains on which colonial discourse analysis and post-

colonial theory operate” (4). In studying colonial discourse, it is important to examine both the implementation and effect of colonial discourse in the past as a tool that helped legitimize colonialism and the continued presence and effect of this discourse. Even though overt colonialism has been, for the most part, eradicated, subtler, neocolonial forms of subjugation, such as economic and cultural subjugation, still exist. Neocolonial subjugation is supported by a neocolonialist discourse that is similar to and influenced by colonialist discourse.

For example, Abdul JanMohamed makes the connections between colonialism and neocolonialism clear by separating colonialism into two phases: the dominant and the hegemonic (61). In the dominant phase according to JanMohamed, “The Indigenous peoples are subjugated by colonialist material practices” (62). In talking about the shift to hegemonic phase which he also calls neocolonialism, he says, “but in all cases, the moment of “independence”—with the natives' obligatory, ritualized acceptance of Western forms of parliamentary government—marks the formal transition to hegemonic colonialism” (62). Therefore, with neocolonialism indigenous populations are formed into nations legally independent from colonial powers, but these populations are still influenced by western ideas and discourses and usually accept Western forms of government. Western systems of government are seen as the only legitimate forms of government.

In discussing discourse, it is important to distinguish the difference between discourse and event. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe say:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the

realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists. . . . But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of “natural Phenomena” or “expressions of the wrath of God” depends upon the structure of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they would constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence. (108)

Discourse is the speaking and writing about the event or object often in an attempt to interpret and control it. Colonial oppression was, and neocolonialist oppression still is, legitimized by a systematic discourse that made this oppression acceptable and silenced other discourses that criticized colonialism.

Frantz Fanon in “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” charts the shift from a colonialist discourse to a neocolonialist discourse and shows how the alienation many postcolonial individuals feel is a direct result of this neocolonialist discourse. Fanon explains that during colonialism there are no indigenous rulers only colonial officials transplanted from the mother country. Once independence is achieved, the indigenous intellectual leaders of the independence movement often become the new governing class. However, they often have little knowledge of economics, no economic power, and no experience governing. Besides this, they have to rely on the mother country for sources of capital. These new “postcolonial elites” often become intermediaries for the economic interests of the mother country in the newly independent country and step into occupations once belonging to individuals from the mother country. The new elite class identifies with the Western officials and internalizes the discourses of the mother country. According to Fanon, the new bourgeoisie “has adopted unreservedly and with enthusiasm the ways of thinking characteristic of the mother country” (www.marxist.org). The new bourgeoisie takes the colonialist discourse, which labels nonwestern individuals as

inferior, and applies it to the poor and ethnic minorities. In order to increase capital, the new governing class exploits agricultural workers and legitimizes this exploitation through a neocolonialist discourse modeled on an Othering colonialist discourse.

As the exploitation of agricultural workers and ethnic minorities continues, the relationship between these populations and the new bourgeoisie begins to mirror the relationship between the indigenous population and the mother country. In order to solidify their power and hide their own corruption, the new postcolonial elite constructs specific populations, often ethnic minorities, as enemies and will instigate and condone violence towards these new enemies. Therefore, violence often increases after decolonization, rather than decreases, as one might expect. Fanon says of the new postcolonial elite, “by its laziness and will to imitation, it promotes the ingrafting and stiffening of racism which was characteristic of the colonial era” (www.marxist.org). Thus, the alienation felt from victims of this neocolonialist discourse is distinct from the general alienation caused by industrialization and the modern condition. In fact, postcolonial nations are often kept in a de-industrialized state, providing cheap labor for the production of raw materials that are still processed in the West. Postcolonial alienation, which is tied to these new material conditions, is also caused by a discourse which has its roots in colonialism and which attempts to mimic the racist relationships and attitudes of colonialism.

Because of the harmful effects of colonialist and neocolonialist discourses, postcolonial theorists often focus on attacking these discourses. Specifically, they challenge “the writing and speech which supports hierarchical divisions, disseminates cultural assumptions, furthers the power of empire and contributes to the subjugation of

the colonized” (Edwards 18). In looking at postcolonialism, it is important to note, as Anne McClintock does, that it is experienced differently in different cultural settings. There is not one uniform postcolonial situation; instead many distinct postcolonial situations exist. Likewise, there is not just one process through which individuals are Othered, and all forms of Othering are not supported by a single discourse. Instead Othering works differently in different contexts. For instance, as will be seen in my discussion of Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, the Sri Lankan government uses anti-Tamil discourse to control certain populations in the same way that the British colonizers once treated the Tamil populations as inferior. In South Asia, where certain ethnic groups were favored by the British as administrators and others sidelined or used as laborers, there is an even greater sense of ethnic polarization than in other parts of the world. This polarizing discourse was part of a divide-and-conquer strategy for this particular region, which already had strong industries and trade routes prior to colonization. In fact, the British often went about *destroying* industries in this region in order to gain an upper hand—for instance, in textiles. But in so doing, they co-opted old ethnic rivalries and hierarchies and often intentionally made them more oppressive.

According to Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, “My contention is without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.” (3) According to Said, Western identity was made to seem more desirable than nonwestern identities, and therefore, something nonwestern cultures should be forced to adapt (7). But an often-overlooked

aspect of Said's *Orientalism* is that Said further points out why Western discourse can be enticing to nonwestern individuals. By embracing this discourse to become as Western as possible, some nonwestern individuals feel they are making themselves more powerful. They can then use this power to dominate other nonwestern individuals, which includes speaking for them and controlling and constructing them through naming (25). In a sense, Said undermines his own "West vs. the rest" argument by showing how even postcolonial leaders take part in "Orientalizing."

Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" discusses the continued effect of Western discourse on nonwestern people, especially subaltern women, the most powerless, lowest class women in India. Spivak questions if the subaltern can speak for themselves. For Spivak, speaking means attempting to represent one's self, to become a subject. For Spivak, this is an impossibility due to the fact that the language of the subaltern is immediately co-opted into dominant discourses that, in part, emerged from colonization. (And, in part, from patriarchy.)

According to Spivak, subalterns have been objectified by the west, and they do not have the power to overcome this objectification (Spivak 70, 73). The West is constantly constructing the subaltern as its Other, and there is no place or means to speak that is free from the influence of the West (Spivak 74-75). Even though her article is entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak questions whether or not postcolonial individuals can speak as well, not just the colonial subaltern. Her answer is no because the same Western forces that prevent the subaltern from speaking prevent postcolonial subjects from speaking, specifically native scholars. They are different from the subaltern because they usually have received the education, status, and economic

prosperity not available to the subaltern. But Spivak concludes that native scholars cannot speak as or for the subaltern because their Western education has shaped their identities and causes them to speak from a Western perspective (78-79). Ultimately, what Spivak is saying is that the subaltern and other nonwestern individuals are in an impossible situation.

Vijay Mishra discussing Spivak's writings on the subaltern says, "This is the peculiar double bind: for the subaltern to speak (in the only legitimate language—that of the master) is to repudiate subaltern subjectivity: to not speak is to deny the subaltern self any agential function" (244). For Spivak, for an individual to express their agency, they must be able to speak in a way that expresses their particular subject position. Because this type of speaking is not available to postcolonial subjects, they can never express agency. As Western colonialist discourse transforms postcolonial individuals into Othered objects for the West, they become alienated from themselves and others. They cannot represent their own subject positions or that of other postcolonial individuals because they can only speak through the removed perspective of Western colonialist discourse.

Spivak also discusses how discourse affects the physical and examines how colonialist discourse alienates postcolonial individuals from their own bodies. For instance, Spivak describes a young girl who hung herself when she was menstruating in an attempt to prove that she was not killing herself because of pregnancy. But the story that was told about the girl, over time, was that this, indeed, was the reason she killed herself. Even her body's physical message was overridden by a patriarchal discourse. Similarly, Spivak claims that women who committed sati in India were controlled by two

conflicting discourses: On the one hand, the British tried to “rescue” sati widows from death as part of their narrative of “saving brown women from brown men.” On the other hand, native men controlled these women with their own narrative of “the women want to die” (97). The native woman’s body merely becomes a pawn caught between two conflicting discourses. Even when the subaltern’s body is not specifically controlled by the colonizer, his or her actions are interpreted by the colonizer in the public sphere. This creates a disconnect between how the acting body and the representation of that body. Because of the power of the colonizers, their labels are legitimized rather than the actions of postcolonial subjects. These legitimized labels and the colonialist discourse they support influence how postcolonial subjects are viewed, both by themselves and by others. For Spivak, therefore, the body is always trapped in isolation and speechlessness.

Like Said, Spivak argues that the colonized only gain legitimacy through a Western voice, a neocolonial voice. In contrast, I will argue that, in postcolonial novels at least, bodies are not in isolation from each other. Through moments of reciprocal recognition of body language, characters are able to evade the labels placed upon them and gain voice, if only for a moment. In turn, these novels provide a moment of hope in the possibility of creating new languages free from the violence of colonial objectification.

Naming and Silencing. As Western explorers started visiting unknown territories, they used the process of labeling people and the environment to control those territories and to ward off their fear of the unknown (McClintock 27). In describing the impulse to name, McClintock says, “the desire to name expresses a desire for a single origin alongside a desire to control the issue of that origin” (29-30). The desire to name is a

desire to control, as well as a desire to simplify. As aspects of individuals' identities, such as their cultural origins, are made more simplistic through naming, other people are sanctioned to treat these individuals as stereotypical objects. As Western nations started to colonize indigenous populations in what they named "discovered" territories," they continued to use naming to control these populations.

After overt colonialism ended, the process of labeling to make individuals feel inferior and to turn them into Others remained. Furthermore, the postcolonial elite adapted this power of labeling to name certain segments of the populations of formerly colonized countries as Other in order to support nationalist discourses. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "the trope of the Other in relation to nationalism must almost a priori fail to do justice to the complex activity, creativity, and engagement of those whom it figures simply as relegated objects" (239). National constructions are often supported by simplistic notions of us versus them. Populations are constructed as Other in discourse to become the "them" for the nationalist "us." As individuals are labeled as Other, they are alienated from themselves because they are forced to portray simplistic identities which do not conform to their complex realities. David Spurr writes, "The very process by which one culture subordinates another begins in the act of naming. . . with marking an unknown territory with lines of division and uniformity (4)." And, "By naming things, we take possession of them" (32).

In the literature I discuss, I will look at the way names are changed by diasporic characters to conform to a Western standard, and thereby create power. The texts I will cover are Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and *The English Patient*, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, and Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* and *Midnight's Children*. For

Ondaatje, naming is central to his novels, which has been discussed by several scholars.¹ Ondaatje idealizes erasing names from maps, for instance, in order to create a new postcolonial language in *The English Patient*. On the other hand, in *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje explores the alternative option—taking on colonial or masculine names in order to gain more power. The protagonist, Anil Tissera leaves Sri Lanka at the age of 18 and goes to college first in England and then in The United States. She spends the next twelve years working in the United States as a forensic anthropologist. She self identifies as a Westerner and finds comfort and meaning in her identity as a Western scientist and in a Westernized discourse of rationality. Anil attempts to improve her situations by renaming herself. Anil renames herself using one of her brother's names to give herself a more masculine name and identity. However, this practice alienates Anil, and the other characters, from others. Anil's renaming of herself, especially the masculine nature of this renaming, instigates a series of arguments between Anil and her parents which culminates in the complete dissolution of Anil's relationship with her parents. Even though Anil's new name is not Western, the masculine identity it represents makes it easier for Anil to be accepted in the West and adopt a Western identity. McClintock, referencing Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry, points out another reason why this adaptation of Western identity leads to alienation: "In Bhabha's schema, mimicry is a flawed identity imposed on colonized people who are obliged to mirror back an image of the colonials but in imperfect form: 'almost the same, but not white'" (62). The mimicry

¹ For more information on naming in Ondaatje's work see Carrol Clarkson's "'By any Other Name': Kripke, Derrida, and an Ethics of Naming," J.U. Jacobs "Exploring, Mapping, and Naming in Postcolonial Fiction; Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*," and Karen Piper's *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, Race and Identity*.

of Western identity leads to a flawed, imposed, ill-fitting identity. Mimicry thus leads to alienation because individuals choose or are forced to adapt ill-fitting identities instead of constructing identities that fit. For Ondaatje, the best solution to this alienation is reciprocal recognition through the mutual giving and receiving of physical touch in small isolated communities.

Shyam Selvadurai explores the affects of ethnic naming, which has its roots in decolonialization. As cultures were becoming freed from colonialism, they established independent nations, and these nations developed discourses that legitimized themselves. Nationalistic, or “us,” identities are often legitimized by being constructed as normal. But, in order to have a normal “us”, there must be an abnormal “them.” According to Ann McClintock, the discourse of nationalism is also masculine, and within this discourse, a kind of normalcy is developed in conjunction with and in opposition to discourses of deviance. The national identity is thus legitimized because it is the normal identity and it opposes “degenerate” identities. (McClintock 46). According to McClintock, “The social power of the image of degeneration was twofold. First, social classes or groups were described with telling frequency as “races,” “foreign groups,” or “nonindigenous bodies,” and could thus be cordoned off as biological and “contagious,” rather than as social groups” (48). By being labeled as deviant or degenerate, subjects are alienated from those who are labeled as normal. The discourse of contagion increases this alienation. Those named as normal avoid interacting with those named as contagious because they are afraid they will be infected by this deviance. For example, McClintock discusses how this discourse of disease affected British elites in the colonies. Many white Victorians saw miscegenation as the most harmful result of infection and sought to

establish barriers between themselves and the colonized in order to prevent miscegenation. McClintock explains, “Controlling women’s sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic, so that, by the turn of the century, sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power. (47).”

In this sense, a kind of heteronormative masculinity was encoded in the language of colonial authority, which is something that continues with the postcolonial “elite.” In contrast, Selvadurai’s characters do not fit easily within either sexual or ethnic boundaries; in contrast, Selvadurai highlights the possibility of a new “in between” space of national identity, which provides hope for the end of constricting boundaries. Seamlessly weaving together the ethnic and sexual identities of his characters, Selvadurai provides hope that a new politics of reciprocal recognition through touch can liberate those who are oppressed. Exploding the myth of heteronormative colonial power, Selvadurai create a new kind of identity for his characters, though only from the safe distance of Canada. As with Ondaatje, Selvadurai suggests that the solution to this alienation is found in reciprocal recognition. However, for Selvadurai, moments of mutual recognition happen more readily through the mutual observation and interpretation of body language between two individuals than through physical touch.

While Ondaatje and Selvadurai are invested in the possibility of escaping colonial-era names and ideologies, Salman Rushdie creates a new form of postcolonial allegory in many of his novels. Rushdie labels and constructs many of his characters in such a way so that they represent concepts or countries. For instance, In *Midnight’s*

Children Saleem and his life is an allegory for post-independence India. Rushdie also explores the tendency of his characters to allegorize themselves or others. For instance, In *Shalimar the Clown*, Peggy Rhodes Ophuls is the wife of American ambassador to India, Maximillian Ophuls. Peggy does not have any children and her greatest desire is to be a mother. Max has an affair with a young, married Kashmiri woman, Boonyi, while Max and Peggy are in India. Boonyi has a child by Max and the affair becomes public which ends Max's career as an ambassador and his marriage to Peggy. Before Peggy divorces Max, she forces Boonyi to give her the child which she raises. Peggy names the girl India to be an allegorical representation of her experiences in India. India represents the tragedy of Peggy losing her husband in India due to a public scandalous affair and the triumph of Peggy being able to gain a child in India. India hates her name because it does not represent her individual personality and situation. Thus, allegorical labels objectify and alienate characters in the novel because these labels deemphasize that character's agency, and instead, focus on the characters being an object that represents something else.

While Rushdie has been seen as an author who employs allegory to rewrite postcolonial history, in *Shalimar the Clown*, he in fact adopts two levels of allegory. First there is the meta-narrative of re-writing postcolonial history through his characters, which stand for nations or places, In this sense, Rushdie is able to subvert traditional colonial histories and create a space for new stories to be told. But second, there is the allegorizing—or naming and renaming—of characters by each other. When this occurs, it is often done in a hostile or negative way that actually undercuts the freedom of the characters' themselves. By this means of having two levels of allegory, Rushdie offers

two opposing discourses at the same time. However, Rushdie's use of allegory shows he is more skeptical than Ondaatje and Selvadurai about the possibility of reciprocal recognition. He sees the allegorical impulse as a barrier to recognition. As characters try to make themselves seem more significant through allegorical labels, they are less likely to see others as equal or to even see the loneliness and pain of others. Without reciprocal recognition, physical connections cannot lead to understand and healing. Instead, attempts at physical connection fail and are often destructive. Rushdie, as much as Selvadurai and Ondaatje, shows how important physical connection is. However, he makes it clear how important it is by illustrating the loneliness and despair that comes from the allegorical impulse. Ironically, at the meta-level, Rushdie creates a libratory allegorical space where postcolonial stories can finally be told rather than old colonial histories.

Reciprocal Recognition. Postcolonial theorists often articulate the alienating and Othering effect of labeling but offer few solutions and little hope. Part of the reason for this hopelessness is, according to Terry Eagleton, that people who are the victims of the alienating influence of colonial discourse through the process of labeling are “forced to struggle in terms given by the oppressor” (Reiss 115). Even in struggling against the labels of colonial discourse, the West defines the terms being debated. In defining the terms, the West has the upper hand. Another reason according to Diana Brydon is “that so much energy is expended on engaging with colonial discourse that the new cultural production of the postcolonial worlds is in danger of being overlooked or even silenced in a process which unwittingly replicates the operations of colonial discourse itself” (Moore-Gilbert 19-20). The positive remains unseen because the lens focuses on the

negative. Because many postcolonial theorists focus on colonial discourse there is, of course, going to be an air of negativity because colonialism and its lingering effects is in no way a positive thing, and it should be exposed as negative. Unfortunately, many postcolonial theorists end with depressing conclusions about the powerlessness of those in postcolonial situations and do not offer suggestions on how to lessen the effects of Western discourse. In contrast, I suggest that the authors that I have chosen to focus on provide a model for hope and connection through the idea of reciprocal recognition.

My reading of these authors is grounded in the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, who provides a model overlooked by postcolonial theorists. According to Simone Drichel:

Given the explicit concern with otherness in (Levinasian) ethics, it is perhaps surprising that ethical questions remain largely unexplored in postcolonial studies, particularly when political echoes of the ethical concerns raised by Levinas's philosophy are frequently found elsewhere: whether it is in questions of globalisation and its effect on local communities or in questions of hospitality to asylum seekers - questions of ethical responsibility for others seem to have gained unprecedented political currency. It seems curious, then, that these ethical concerns are only slowly finding a similar resonance in postcolonial debates and are rarely discussed on a theoretical level. (section 3)

Levinas and other theorists of ethics deal explicitly with concerns about Otherness.

Therefore, issues in postcolonial theory about the Other can and should be informed by the work in the field of ethics on the Other. Part of the contribution of this dissertation to postcolonial theory is showing how the problematics of Othering through naming are illuminated and possible solutions to these problematics posed by postcolonial authors become apparent as specific works of literature are explored through the lenses of both ethical and postcolonial theory.

Specifically I am advocating a politics of reciprocal recognition. What I mean is that Othering can be overcome and a kind of communal intersubjectivity can be formed as individual subjects both mutually recognize the other's suffering and view the other individual as a subject. Through this mutual recognition, both parties are healed, at least partially from the alienating effects of naming. According to Judith Butler, "True subjectivities come to flourish only in communities that provide for reciprocal recognition" (58). In delineating what it means for recognition to be reciprocal Drichel says, "The recognition that passes between self and other cannot be one-sided (such as in the master/slave situation) but must be mutual. For it to be mutual, the other must be accepted as another self" (section 8). Subject positions can only replace Othered positions as individuals recognize each other as subjects. Butler points out that reciprocal recognition does not happen in all contexts. Only certain contexts and communities provide for the possibility of reciprocal recognition. Stephen Houlgate points at the importance of moments of recognition in individuals becoming subjects: "We achieve certainty of ourselves only when we are recognized by another whom we recognize as free" (20). Individuals become acting subjects and overcome the alienation forced on them through naming as they are recognized as a free subject and in turn provide a moment of recognition to another.

Moments of mutual recognition do not always happen through language; they can also powerfully occur through the body. In this dissertation, I argue that the characters in the novels I discuss alleviate the alienating and Othering effects of Western colonial discourse through experiencing moments of reciprocal recognition through physical connections with others. In the novels I discuss, this connection happens in two main

ways for the characters. One way is through touch, specifically touch informed by and conveying recognition. What I mean is an individual will touch another character, maybe by hugging them or holding their hand, to express understanding. In turn, the sorrowing character recognizes the concern and communicates their appreciation by touching the other person in return, for instance, by hugging back or putting their arm on the other person's shoulder.

The other way characters demonstrate moments of recognition through the body is by way of the giving and receiving of recognition through body language. One character will observe the body language of another and will gain understanding about that person and his or her emotional state. This understanding engenders compassion towards the other character. The character being gazed at is often aware of the gaze and recognizes the compassion in the body language of the gazer. Through his or her own body language, the character communicates acceptance of this recognition. This process happens repeatedly in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. For instance, when the narrator, Arjie, is alone in the library with another boy, Shehan, who eventually becomes his friend and then his lover, he observes Shehan's body language, "He smiled tentatively, as if he was not sure that I would return his smile. I felt suddenly shy but, wanting to acknowledge his gesture of friendship, I smiled back" (236). Arjie interprets Shehan's smile as a tentative gesture of friendship. Arjie understands the message of Shehan's smile and communicates his understanding and acknowledgement of Shehan's overtures of friendship by smiling back, which, as is acknowledged in the text, forms a connection between the two. The connection created by body language as communication, as with touch, sets up an reciprocal relationship between the participants

in which each sees the other as a subject. As characters understand that they are being seen as subjects, they start to see themselves as subjects instead of as Othered objects.

A New Body. It is important to clarify that I am discussing textual bodies and not actual bodies. I am examining textual depictions of fictional characters experiencing moments of reciprocal recognition through the body and not moments of recognition between real bodies and real individuals. But the value of literature is it allows authors to experiment with possible solutions by creating experiences and places that the author may not have access to in real life. Therefore in fiction, authors are able to test possible solutions for the very real alienating effects of naming and see if they seem possible and productive in realistic, albeit fictional situations. Other theorists have explored how authors use fiction to imagine forms of resistance to colonialism and colonial and neocolonial influences and to reinterpret meaning placed on the body. For instance, Sara Upstone in *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* explores how postcolonial novels, such as Toni Morrison's *Paradise* and Salman Rushdie's *Fury*, attempt to "reconfigure the body's significance in a way that marks the ultimate reduction of spatial scales, as the sight of greatest colonisation becomes a resource facilitation the most powerful statements of resistance" (147). Therefore, while authors are dealing with textual bodies, they can use their fiction to "reconfigure the body's significance" and imagine ways that the body can as an agent of resistance, which may be applicable to real life situations.

By positing that agency and understanding can be found through the body, these writers contradict Foucault who claims that the body is always institutionally coerced and ideologically conditioned to meet the utilitarian demands of "'discipline' and 'power,' which see a docile and subjected body as socially, politically and economically

productive” (Ball 132). For Foucault, the body is as much a slave to discourse as language. Foucault however is imagining a world in which relations are always unequal with regard to power and that the body is the victim of this unequal power distribution. The writers I discuss, however, imagine situations of equal power distribution between individuals, or at least situations where those with more power recognize the agency of those with less power and thus forgo the exercise of their power so that mutual recognition can occur. The writers illustrate the understanding that comes as two subjects recognize each other as subjects as opposed to the coercive subject/other relationships of colonialism. These relationships lessen the alienation between individuals, and they also help individuals become less alienated from themselves. These relationships help the characters in the novels discover and reclaim their bodies by seeing the worth another character places on their body. This gives the characters the strength to find the agency to question the gaze of colonialism. They are then able to reject this gaze and start to interpret their bodies for themselves. (Forster 21-22).

In Ondaatje, Selvadurai, and Rushdie’s constructions of the body, it is possible read what phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty calls a spatial form in which experience is encapsulated (Upstone 148). These authors depict the body as something tangible and corporeal that takes up space but is defined by experience. Specifically, these authors present characters who question colonial constructions of their bodies that legitimize their oppression. According to Upstone, “Perhaps more than in human experience in general, colonisation has been a project centered upon the appropriation and manipulation of bodies as both a territory and the key to maintaining successful control of the land” (148). Colonialism constructed bodies as territories and spaces that could be colonized,

controlled, and mapped. This construction of the body as territory happened through physical violence (slavery, torture, and rape) and epistemological violence (149). This construction of the body as territory relies on Descartes understanding of the body:

Descartes' construction allowed for representation of the body as a passive form that could be seized and appropriated, described by Descartes as opposite to the fluid mind that was representative of the creative and transcendent. Such basic form meant the body could be defined absolutely, used as a defining principle of an individual. Yet, paradoxically, as it was without agency it could also be endlessly redefined. Colonial discourse of the body relies upon this contradiction, a body at once intensely visible, but at the same time unrecognized; nothing because it only has one form but also, for this very same reason, strongly defined (Upstone 151).

Descartes' construction of the body explains how colonialist discourse as propagated through naming outlives overt colonialism and continues into the neocolonialist era. This construction of the body as territory, passive, object, and without agency allows it to be endlessly redefined. Therefore, while the end of colonialism put an end to overt colonialist labels, it did not eradicate this construction of the body as object. Because this construction of the body remained, it became easy to continue to redefine indigenous bodies through labels in ways that still supported colonialist discourse and still often perpetuated violence.

If bodies were and to some extent still are controlled by physical violence and colonialist discourse, how can postcolonial authors through fiction imagine any healing and escape from colonialist discourse? One thing the violence of colonial history makes clear is that any questioning of colonialist discourse has to be envisioned through the body because of the extent to which bodies in colonial and neocolonial situations have been constructed through discourse as territories that can be controlled. The authors I discuss use their textual depictions of bodies to argue that healing from colonial discourse

can come through the body during moments of reciprocal recognition even though the body has been marked and controlled by colonial discourse. What the characters recognized in these moments based on touch or body language is a new conceptualization of the body. The body is seen not as territory as an object that can be defined and controlled but as an agent subject that can act for itself, and which is defined and marked by its many experiences and not just one imposed label. In fact, using touch to express recognition is proof that the body of the other can act for itself,

I have been talking about moments of reciprocal recognition and not sustained reciprocal recognition. The authors I discuss do not focus on lasting changes but on these moments of recognition that happen here and there and on how healing and a questioning of Othering discourses can happen during these moments. I am not saying that these authors suggest that reciprocal recognition through physical connection is a complete solution or is the only solution to the alienation caused by labeling. Body language and physical touch as forms of communication are fragmented and offers glimmers and moments of understanding rather than creating stable identities free of all alienation. Many of the novels themselves ask how permanent the changes caused by moments of recognition are. They question whether the changes last after the characters who formed the physical connections are no longer in close physical proximity to each other. The authors do not answer this question; however, they provide moments where alienation is overcome through physical connections. They are not confident that these moments lead to complete healing or even change the discourse, but these moments allow a questioning of discourse to occur and give the characters moments of healing, which gives them hope that complete healing is possible. These moments of connection are tangible proof that

alienation is not absolute and that the power of names does not erase all avenues for agency.

Part 1 Michael Ondaatje

Chapter 1 ““There are no Words”: Experiencing Reciprocal Recognition through Touch in *Anil’s Ghost*”

In Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*, the protagonist, Anil Tissera, feels that naming is a good thing. She feels that by naming specific victims of the Sri Lankan Civil War that she can get justice for those victims. However, her attempts at naming do not lead to justice and instead support colonial discourse and lead to Anil being further alienated from her Sri Lankan roots. In this chapter I am going to examine how Michael Ondaatje in *Anil’s Ghost* examines how naming, as a tool of Western colonial discourse, estranging individuals from themselves and others. I then explore a solution to this estrangement. In *Anil’s Ghost*, characters experience moments of mutual recognition through physical touch. These moments help the characters become connected with each other. These connections alleviate the alienation of Ondaatje’s characters, including Anil, and allow them to recognize their own subjectivity.

Anil is from Sri Lanka but has been educated and worked in the West as a Forensic anthropologist since she was eighteen years old. She is returning to Sri Lanka in 1992 at the age of 33 as a representative of the United Nations investigating human rights violations committed by the Sri Lankan government. She is paired with a Sri Lankan anthropologist, Sarath. They find a skeleton that Anil identifies as being only five or six years old, which she names Sailor, at an archeological excavation site among three skeletons that are centuries old. She finds proof on the skeleton that this person had been brutally killed, and she thinks Sailor was the victim of a political murder because, as she

tells Sarath, “It [the skeleton] was found within a sacred historical site. A site constantly under government or political supervision” (54). It becomes Anil’s mission to discover the identity of Sailor. She achieves her mission with the help of Ananda, an artisan from a rural village who makes a bust reconstructing what Sailor would have looked like based on his skull. Anil discovers that Sailor was a miner named Ruwan Kumara. However, this knowledge does not lead to justice. When Anil presents her findings to the Sri Lankan governmental officials, Sarath discredits her so the officials will not kill her, and the officials confiscate her notes and make her leave Sri Lanka. Sarath secretly give Anil access to Sailor the night before she has to leave so she can reconstruct her notes. Sarath is eventually killed and tortured by government officials for his involvement with Anil’s investigation. His body is found and tended by his estranged brother Gamini, a doctor.

There are two main strands in the criticism on *Anil’s Ghost*. One group of critics disapproves of Ondaatje’s depiction of the Sri Lankan Civil War. Tom LeClair in his review of *Anil’s Ghost* complains that Ondaatje does not give sufficient context for understanding the civil war and does not discuss the factors which led to the instigation and continuance of the war. For instance, Ondaatje does not provide concrete information about the different factions involved and why they are fighting. Qadri Ismail’s criticism of Ondaatje’s depiction of the Sri Lankan Civil War in “A Flippant Gesture Towards Sri Lanka: A Review of Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*” is even harsher. While Ismail agrees that Ondaatje does not provide enough contextual information about the war, he further argues that the information Ondaatje’s does include makes his depiction racist. Ismail maintains that because Ondaatje focuses primarily on

Sinhalese characters and locales in *Anil's Ghost* and not Tamil characters he supports Sinhalese nationalism.

The second group of critics agrees that Ondaatje is vague in his discussion of the Sri Lankan War, its historical context, and the politics surrounding the war. However, they maintain that Ondaatje purposely leaves the war in the background because it is not his focus. He uses the war as a backdrop to his discussion of globalization and the problematic relationship between the global and the local. Victoria Cook in “‘A Spectre of the Transnational’; Exploring Identity as Process in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*” looks at how Ondaatje’s uses Anile to explore how globalization influences national and individual constructions of identity and the tensions between the national and the transnational. David Farrier also discusses Ondaatje’s privileging of the local in “Gesturing Towards the Local: Intimate Histories in *Anil’s Ghost*.” He explores Ondaatje’s engagement with issues of truth from localized, personal perspectives.

Teresa Derrickson in her article “Will the ‘Un-Truth’ Set You Free? A Critical Look at Global Human Rights Discourse in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*” also examines Ondaatje’s critique of globalization. She specifically focuses on Ondaatje’s critique of the United Nation’s universal mandate on human rights as a form of cultural imperialism. The United Nation attempts to force nonwestern countries to accept a Western discourse about human rights. This attempt creates more problems than solutions. According to Derrickson, for Ondaatje a solution to the crisis in Sri Lanka is found instead “in the material world itself, in the simple show of compassion that travels from person to person” (149). While Derrickson argues that Ondaatje suggests healing can come from interpersonal connections, she does not focus specifically on alienation

caused by labeling being the problem and on touch being the vehicle for reciprocal recognition to travel. She also spends most of her article articulating the problem of Western discourse about human rights as discussed by Ondaatje and does not expound on her argument that Ondaatje finds hope in local, interpersonal relations.

I disagree with the first group of critics that the book fails because in it Ondaatje is not extensively speaking about or against the Sri Lankan Civil War. Although he was born in Sri Lanka, Michael Ondaatje left when he was 11 and has lived in Canada since 1962. Because of this, some critics consider him a Canadian writer and not a Sri Lankan one (Wijesinha 74). If he were to speak more directly about the war, he would be attempting to speak for the Sri Lankans from a Western position, something he critiques Anil for attempting to do. In an interview with Maya Jaggi about *Anil's Ghost*, he says:

What worried me is that this book would be taken as representative; I do backflips to avoid that. There is a tendency with us in Canada to say, this is a book 'about Sri Lanka'. But it isn't a statement about the war, as if it is the 'true and only story'. It is my individual take on four or five characters, a personal tunneling into it (6).

He does not want to be taken as representative. He does not want readers to mistakenly think he is telling "the story" of the Sri Lankan Civil war. Instead, he is telling the fictional story of a handful of characters' personal experiences with the war. At the beginning of a previous novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje includes an epigram from John Berger which says, "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one." This quote is so important to Ondaatje that he says that it is one of his "rock bottom values for me as a writer" (Ondaatje, "Pale Flags" 62). In *Anil's Ghost* he makes it clear that his story of the Sri Lankan Civil War is not the only one. He also makes it clear in *Anil's Ghost* that the type of speaking that critiques are requiring of him is

impossible. There is no easy solution to the situation in Sri Lanka, and in talking about the civil war more explicitly and in a larger context, individuals who are personally affected by the war are forgotten or lose their voice because they are represented by the more powerful voices of Westerners.

My own argument about *Anil's Ghost* is more in line with the criticism of the second group. I agree Ondaatje leaves out concrete details about the Sri Lankan Civil War to focus on his exploration of the global and the local. However, there are distinctions between my argument and the arguments of scholars such as Cook, Farrier, and Derrickson. I explore how in the novel touch is used as a means to counter act colonial discourse. While Farrier and Derrickson mention physical connection and interpersonal relationships, their discussions are brief, and they do not concentrate specifically on physical touch as a means of overcoming the alienation caused by labeling. Farrier focuses on the creation of local truth through the body, while I am focusing more on the interpersonal connections created through touch. I also examine Western discourse from a different angle. Derrickson focuses specifically on the Western discourse on human rights and Farrier looks broadly at Western constructions of truth. I, instead, explore the alienating effects of colonial discourse as manifested through naming.

Anil has been indoctrinated to Western values and is attempting to speak for Sri Lankans in a global context, the United Nations, as a Westerner. She even rejects her Sinhalese background and self identifies as a Westerner. When Cullis, her married lover, asks about her ethnicity, she replies, "I live here in the West" (36). In fact, when she left Sri Lanka to study in English, she "courted foreignness" and "felt complete abroad" (54).

In contrast, Sarath Diyasena and his brother Gamini have lived in Sri Lanka all their lives and are critical about the views many Westerners have about Sri Lanka. They are especially critical of Anil's quest to discover the truth about the Sri Lankan Civil War, which they feel it is an impossible task.

The Sri Lankan Civil War is central to *Anil's Ghost* because Ondaatje is focusing on the attempts to name, especially to name victims, amidst violence. The civil war, which ended in 2009 with the Sri Lankan military's defeat of the Tamil Tigers, had been on and off again since 1983 between the predominantly Sinhalese government and Tamil separatist groups, particularly the Tamil Tigers. This conflict has its roots in British colonial rule, and the first post independence constitution, which was very pro Sinhalese. The disputes between the Tamils and Sinhalese increased in 1965 when Sinhala was made the official language of Sri Lanka, a move contested by the Tamil speaking minority (Burrows 167). Therefore, language is one of the chief factors in the Sri Lankan Civil War. However, as Arjun Guneratne points out, this focus on language conceals the more fundamental similarities between Sinhalese and Tamils. He says:

The Sinhalese may be thought of as a Dravidian people in social structure (which suggests a link to south India) but Indo-Aryan in language (which suggests a link with the North). Kinship is inherently more conservative than language in that it is less likely to change. That Sinhalese and Tamils share a common structure of kinship that is distinctly different from the prevailing in North India suggest the South Indian Origin of the Sinhalese. (23)

Even though they have different languages, Sinhalese and Tamils are extremely similar culturally, and there is significant data to support a shared Sinhalese/Tamil ancestry.

The division between Tamils and Sinhalese is actually very recent: "The opposition between the concepts Sinhala/Tamil is a modern one, arising out of a modern

situation beginning in the economic and social transformations of the colonial period” (Guneratne 23). British colonials solidified Sinhalese and Tamil’s into distinct groups and laid the groundwork for the current difficulties. In Sri Lanka under the British, political representation was delineated on the basis of race. In 1833 a colonial governmental system was set up for Sri Lanka. This system consisted primarily of British officials but included three unofficial members: one Low-Country Sinhala, one Burgher, and one Tamil. This system helped solidify and exacerbate racial differences between Sinhalese and Tamils (Nissan and Stirrat 28). The situation became more intensified as in the nineteenth century the British important large groups of Tamils from India to work on the plantations and Ceylon Tamils started moving south into Sinhalese areas for better employment. The Sinhalese felt threatened by the influx of Tamils, and having to interact more and more with Tamils in their daily life and having to compete with them for jobs lead to Sinhalese resenting the Tamils (Nissan and Stirrat 33). Also, although tensions existed between the Tamils and British as it did between the Sinhalese and British, there was, especial in Jaffna, greater cultural commonality between British officials and Tamils than existed between the officials and Sinhalese (Sabaratnam 78). The Tamil’s in Jafna also gained greater competency in English than other ethnic groups (Sabaratnam 109). Because of their knowledge of English, many Tamils were appointed to administrative positions in both Sinhala and Tamil areas and were placed in positions of authority (Sabaratnam 112). These appointments led Sinhalese to believe that the British favored Tamils and increased their resentment.

Independence from Great Britain in 1948 instigated violent conflicts between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese majority about how to draw up the constitution. This

conflict flared into riots when the government passed the “Sinhala Only Act” in 1956, which made Sinhala the official language of Sri Lanka. The civil war officially started in 1983 when a group called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, also known as LTTE or Tamil Tigers started an armed conflict with the Sri Lankan government in order to create a separate Tamil state in the predominately Tamil north east section of Sri Lanka. In their first encounter, the Tamil Tigers killed 13 soldiers. In retaliation Sinhalese began rioting in Colombo July 23, 1983 burning Tamil homes and businesses and killing Tamils. The riots spread to other cities and during the riots hundreds if not thousands of Tamils were killed. The Tamil Tigers responded with further violence, and the war became an on and off conflict ultimately resulting in the death of over 80,000 people (De Silva 259-277).

The civil war also borrows the Western concept of the nation. Through discourse, Tamils and Sinhalese have been crystallized into distinct national groups, even though both exist in the same nation. In fact, one of the main demands of the Tamil Tigers and other Tamil groups is a separate Tamil nation. The focus on nationalism belies the complex ancestry and relationship between Sinhalese and Tamils, and it hides the many similarities between the two groups. Because there are many cultural similarities between the two groups, “the languages they speak have become the symbols around which separate modern identities have crystallized” (Guneratne 35). Language identifies one as a Tamil or Sinhalese, and once named, they can then be named as friend and foe.

Ondaatje himself does not give much background on the war but focuses on how it impacts his main characters. He explores the inability of his characters to speak of the violence they have witnessed. He also examines how the violence has shattered their

sense of self and has alienated them from themselves. This alienation cannot be expressed nor healed through language, since language is the source of division. He purposely does not focus on government officials or members of the Tamil Tigers. In interviews he has said that he wanted to examine “how ordinary people live through violence, what goes on in private” (Scanlan 303). For Ondaatje’s characters, this speaking though and of violence cannot be done through verbal language, and especially not through naming the violence, victims, or perpetrators.

However, when Anil first arrives in Sri Lanka, she feels that she will easily complete her mission, believing that she can speak for the violence done to individual Sri Lankans. She quickly finds the skeleton of a person who has been dead only five years hidden in an archeological site with other skeletons that are centuries old. Only government officials have access to the archeological site; therefore, the skeleton must be the victim of government sponsored murder. Anil feels that if she can identify the skeleton she could then label he has a victim and use his status as victim to represent “all of those lost voices” and find justice for all the victims of the civil war (56). She believes what her teacher in Oklahoma said, “One village can speak for many villages. One victim can speak for many victims” (176). She keeps thinking to herself “to give him a name would name the rest” (56). She even gives him the arbitrary name of Sailor in her initial attempts to claim and speak for him (51). According to Paul Brians, “the corpse is irreverently dubbed “Sailor,” according to the old children’s counting rhyme that begins “Tinker, Tailor,/ Soldier, sailor,/ Rich man, poor man,/ Beggar-man, thief.” Little girls used to recite it to determine what sort of man they would marry” (184). Even though the name of Sailor is inaccurate, he turns out to have been a miner, it depicts the level of

commitment Anil has to Sailor. She is “married” or in other words completely committed to her quest of finding out Sailor’s real name. She eventually is successful and discovers that Sailor’s name is Ruwan Kumara. Even though Anil finds out Sailor’s real name, Anil fails in her efforts to speak for the other victims by naming Sailor as a specific victim. The Sri Lankan government confiscates her research and exiles her from the country. Naming Sailor does not name the rest, the rest being all those who have died as a result of the Sri Lankan civil war.

One of the problem’s with Anil’s attempts name to name Sailor as victim is that she is, at the beginning of the novel, completely aligned with the West. As Victoria Cook says:

Closer examination of Ondaatje's construction of Anil Tissera raises a number of points, such as: she is Westernized; she has an adopted masculine name, which we learn she "bought" for herself from her brother; she is a scientist and spokesperson for the United Nations -- a combination of factors which render her the antithesis of Gayatri Spivak's "subaltern woman" (7).

This construction of Anil as the antithesis of the subaltern and her being ostracized as a Sri Lankan citizen is best seen linguistically. In buying her brother’s name, Anil rejects her role as a female member of Sri Lankan society and attempts to enter the masculine world. Her desires to enter the masculine world are denied to her in Sri Lanka, despite the name change, but available to her in the West. However, this freedom comes at a price. John Bolland sees Anil’s buying of her brother’s name as evidence that she has “rejected her Sri Lankan culture, finding its strong communal ties oppressive” (107). In order to embrace the individuality of the West, Anil must reject the communal ethos. Her original name, the name given to her by her parents, is lost—the novel never mentions it.

Her successful attempt to buy her brother's name caused frustration, anger and division in her family (67). The argument about her name, especially its masculine nature, ultimately leads to the complete dissolution of her relationship with her parents (137). Ironically, the name does not make her life better and does not cause others to treat her with more respect. As Victoria Burrows says in regards to *Anil's Ghost*, "no one in the novel is healed through the agency of his or her own words" (165). This failure of language includes a failure of names and labels.

It is clear how much Anil has lost when she returns to Sri Lanka Westernized. Anil can no longer fluently speak Sinhala and now speaks primarily English. When she goes to visit her old nanny Lalitha, who was the person Anil was the closest to growing up, she can barely communicate verbally in Sinhala with her and has to rely on Lalitha's granddaughter to translate. She is even further separated from Lalitha, the symbol of her Sri Lankan past, when the granddaughter starts talking to Lalitha in Tamil, a language Anil, never knew (22-24). Anil, no longer able to even speak with any non-English speaking Sri Lankans, tries to speak for them about a violence she never experienced from a Western perspective.

Gamini is critical of this Western perspective and the ability of Westerners to understand let alone speak for the situation in Sri Lanka. Near the end of the novel, Anil remembers a conversation she had with Gamini:

'American movies, English books—remember how they all end?' Gamini asked that night. 'The American or the Englishman gets on a plane and leaves. That's it. The camera leaves with him. He looks out of the window at Mombasa or Vietnam or Jakarta, someplace now he can look at through the clouds. The tired hero. A couple of words to the girl besides him. He's going home. So the war. To all purposes, is over.'

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.' (285-286)

Despite the attempts of members of the West to speak about the violence in Sri Lanka and the victims, according to Gamini, no real understanding happens because the reason for speaking are to look like a hero and not to uncover the truth, and this path is legitimized by Western movies and books. Because the Westerner is no longer observing the war, he/she thinks of it as over. As far as the West is concerned it is over even though people are still being killed in Sri Lanka.

Ondaatje makes it clear that Anil is influenced by this heroic narrative. She wants to quickly go to Sri Lanka, fix things, and then return to the West and write her report for the U.N. fooling herself that the war is over or would soon be over and the victims would receive justice. Anil does fulfill her quest and discover Sailor's identity, but the government confiscates her notes and forces her to leave the country. She is not leaving of her own accord as the returning hero. In the end she cannot fulfill the pattern—she cannot go home and write a book because she has lost her proof and has even begun to question whether she still fully believes in her ability or right to name others as victims. Even though Sarath does disobey the government and gives Anil access to Sailor the night before she has to leave, so she can reconstruct her report, Ondaatje has questioned the reliability of naming the victims so extensively throughout the novel that the reader question whether Anil's report will change anything, especially since the Sri Lankan government wants to discredit her (284).

Although Ondaatje doubts that change and justice can occur at the global level, he does suggest that change and connection can happen between individuals, even if that

connection has become lost through alienation. In describing Anil's reunion with Lalitha Ondaatje says:

When Anil leaned back the old woman was weeping; she put her hands out and ran them over Anil's hair. Anil held her arms. There was a lost language between them. She kissed Lalitha on both cheeks having to bend down to her because she was so small and frail. (22)

Although there is a lost language between them, Anil is able to communicate somewhat with Lalitha through touch. Victoria Burrows says, "It is not easy to recover from trauma in isolation. The central affective gesture offered as a means of passing beyond trauma in Ondaatje's novel is the intersubjective empathy of human touch" (175). Touch leads to some powerful moments of recognition in the novel, which then leads to personal understanding and change. Many of the characters are able to communicate who they are, and their experiences of violence through touch and ultimately find sympathy and companionship through the touch of another.

Anil most powerful moment of reciprocal recognitions happens as she touches Ananda. Anil cannot communicate verbally with Ananda because he does not speak English, and she no longer speaks Sinhala fluently. Anil is frustrated that they cannot communicate directly but must communicate through Sarath as translator. They are finally able to connect to each other through touch when Ananda finds her weeping:

He moved two steps forward and with his thumb creased away the pain around her eyes along with her tears' wetness. It was the softest touch on her face. . . Ananda's hand on her shoulder to quiet her while the other hand came up to her face, kneaded the skin of that imploded tension of weeping as if hers too was a face being sculpted, though she could tell that wasn't in his thoughts. This was a tenderness she was receiving. Then his other hand on her other shoulder, the other thumb under her right eye. Her sobbing had stopped. . . Now Ananda had touched her in a way she could recollect no one ever having touched her, except,

perhaps, Lalitha. Or perhaps her mother somewhere further back in her lost childhood (187).

Anil is crying because she just heard about the plight of Ananda's wife, and she is starting to recognition Ananda's pain and feel compassion toward him. Ananda does not know Anil is weeping for him. He just sees that she is suffering and tries to ease her suffering. As he touches her, Anil understands that he is offering comfort; although, they cannot talk to each other. She realizes that it "was a tenderness she was receiving. For both of them, "the physical language of touch both communicates and eases physical and psychic pain" (Burrows 175). Anil and Ananda's mutual recognition of each other's pain is central to one of Ondaatje's main themes. In talking about *Anil's Ghost*, Patricia P. Chu says, "acts of compassionate witnessing can renew shattered spirits, inspire commitments to change, and lead to new relationships between individuals and their communities" (94). According to Ondaatje, even in the midst of the horrors of the Sri Lankan Civil War, there is hope. This hope comes through compassion witnessing, and this compassion is expressed in *Anil's Ghost* physically.

The touch between Anil and Ananda not only powerfully connects Anil to Ananda it also reconnects Anil to Sri Lanka. Lalitha is Anil's strongest connection to Sri Lanka. By comparing Ananda's touch to Lalitha's, Ondaatje is suggesting that Ananda's touch helps reconnect Anil to Sri Lanka. As Sanghera says, "it is not just a touch that takes Anil into the past, it also roots her simultaneously her in the present. It citizens Anil clearly to the Sri Lanka she stands in now" (90). This touch citizens Anil to Sri Lanka because it gives her a concrete connection to Sri Lanka. She is connected to a Sri Lankan, Ananda, in the present and reconnected symbolically to a Sri Lankan, Lalitha, from her past. Later on Anil thinks back to this moment, "she felt she could speak in any

language, he would understand the purpose of any gesture. How far back was their moment of connection, when his hand had been on her shoulder” (197). Anil feels her connection with Ananda has eliminated barriers to communication. Even though Ananda touched her less than a day ago, she questions when it took place because the experience seems too momentous to have occurred so recently. Anil, though Ananda’s touch, is finally able to overcome her isolation and connect with another individual.

Anil also learns about the importance of touch through observing Ananda. Anil, Ananda, and Sarath go to an abandoned estate in Ekneligoda in order to determine Sailor’s identity in privacy. In this isolated locale, Ananda reconstructs what Sailor looked like through touch. He is constantly touching the skull and carrying it around with him. Anil watches Ananda, and she starts to put down her scientific instruments and to touch Sailor herself:

She too would need to reach forward and lift Sailor into her arms, to remind herself he was like her. Not just evidence, but someone with charms and flaws, part of a family, a member of a village who in the sudden lightning of politics raised his hands at the last minute, so they were broken. (170)

Through touch, Anil is able to recognize Sailor as a former living human, instead of just seeing Sailor as an object she can use to achieve her objectives. This relationship with Sailor differs from how she was taught to treat skeletons in the West. She thinks about how when working with a cadaver “she put her hand out and held her palm a millimeter over the flesh to take in its body heat. *Its not his or hers anymore*” (19). While the idea of body heat makes the cadaver seem living, Anil resists thinking of the cadaver’s connection to human life and views it as an object. She does this by calling the body it and by refusing to connect with it through touch. She has been taught to treat skeletons

as inanimate objects without gender or humanity as if all traces of humanity leave at death. She rarely even touches corpses and deals with them primarily through scientific instruments (19). However, Western detachment and objectivity are not as effective in finding out Sailor's identity or in forming relationships with others as is mutual recognition.

Significantly, this reconnection through the physical happens in the context of violence. Anil is crying because she has been touched by the violence of Ananda's life. She has witnessed ethnic violence throughout the world, but for the first time it is personal because she has formed a personal relationship with someone who has experienced violence. She sees beyond the label of victim which would stereotype and objectify Ananda and sees him as an individual. She cannot even talk to Ananda, but she can connect with him through mutual recognition. Ananda recognizes Anil's sadness through interpreting her crying and is able to overcome the alienating effects of violence and physically comfort Anil in her pain. This moment of reciprocal recognition puts Anil on the path of healing and reconnection.

Just as Anil is healed through Ananda's touch, Ananda starts his own healing process as he touches Anil. As Ananda starts to express her recognition of the pain of another person and begins to connect with another individual, he starts to feel again. After his wife's disappearance and most likely death, Ananda isolated himself from others and his feelings. He does this, in part, by becoming an alcoholic. As Ananda begins to connect with Anil, he also re-experiences the grief over the loss of his wife, an emotion he has been repressing. He initially tries to escape this return of grief and attempts to commit suicide by stabbing himself in the throat. However, Anil finds him

and physically puts pressure on his wound so he does not bleed to death as Sarath drives them to the hospital (195-198). By saving his life and continuing to provide physical comfort through which she recognizes him as a subject, Anil gives Ananda the time and strength to deal with his grief and heal. And by the end of the novel, Ananda has begun to heal. He is able to control his alcohol addiction enough to be functional. He has returned to painting the eyes of statues of Buddha, and he supervises other workers as they reconstruct statues of Buddha that had been destroyed by thieves (301-302). As he works, he wears Sarath's cotton shirt and thinks, "He and the woman Anil would always carry the ghost of Sarath Diyasena (305). Ananda is wearing a tangible reminder of Sarath. He continues to remember the connections he made in the abandoned estate, and they continue to have an effect on him.

Many of the physical connections between characters happen in the context of violence and allow the participants to speak through this violence. Sarath and Anil are driving when they see a man, Gunesena, nailed to the road. They rescue him, and Anil washes the blood off his hands, physically participating in his healing (111). Gunesena eventually becomes their driver and becomes a fixture of Anil's life in Sri Lanka. When she takes Gunesena to a hospital in Colombo, Anil meets Sarath's brother Gamini. As a doctor he is worn out taking care of the victims of violence. After her experience with Ananda, Anil is more immediately able to recognize Gamini's pain: "she touched his shoulder. He brought his hand up for a moment and then his head slopped away and soon she saw he had fallen asleep. His skull, his uncombed hair, the weight of his tiredness on her lap" (133). Through touch Anil is able to transmit her recognition of Gamini

suffering to him, and in Anil's lap, Gamini is able to find a moment of peace and rest, something he does not often receive.

Gamini, a doctor who has witnessed the mutilation of bodies caused by violence, is able to still find peace in physicality. He disbelieved all motives for war and instead “believed only in the mothers sleeping against their children, the great sexuality of spirit in them, the sexuality of care, so the children would be confident and safe during the night” (119). He believes only in the care mothers have for children, which was conveyed through the touch of “mothers sleeping against their children. In fact, before finding rest in Anil's lap, he can only sleep in the children's ward amidst these mothers, where he experiences vicariously the physical mutual recognition that exists between the children and their mothers. He needs this because he does not experience mutual recognition with his only living family member—his brother Sarath. Gamini and Sarath are estranged because Gamini loved Sarath's wife who committed suicide (251). This estrangement is acknowledged through their lack of physical contact, “there had been no touching between him and Sarath, not a handshake” (129). Even though they talk to each other, the lack of a physical relationship conveys the lack of a significant relationship, which their words attempt to hide.

This physical estrangement changes after Sarath dies and Gamini recognizes his body. Ondaatje, who is focusing on healing and not destructive forms of touch, does not explicitly say how Sarath dies. Sarath believes he will be killed by the government for his involvement with Anil's investigation. Gamini then discovers Sarath's tortured body in his hospital's morgue. He examines Sarath's torso first, and he recognizes Sarath,

even before he sees his head, through the scars left from childhood wounds (287). As he examines Sarath's body, Gamini thinks:

But this was a *pieta* between brothers. And all Gamini knew in his slowed, scrambled state was that this would be the end or it could be the beginning of a permanent conversation with Sarath. If he did not talk to him in this moment, admit himself, his brother would disappear from his life. So he was too, at this moment, within the contract of a *pietà*. (288)

Gamini sees his examination of Sarath's body as the last chance to have a conversation with his brother. However, despite using words like conversation and talk, Gamini does not verbally communicate with his brother. Instead, he caresses his brother's body as he examines it and witnesses the physical signs of his brother's torture. As he examines the body, he thinks about his past with his brother and is able to recognize his brother's pain in a way he was unable to when Sarath was alive (289). He is able to 'talk' to his brother, express sorrow over his death and their estrangement through touching his brother's body. Gamini cannot engage in mutual recognition with Sarath because Sarath is dead and cannot respond. However, in viewing this experience as a conversation with his brother, this becomes a moment of mutual recognition for him. Gamini sees his brother's body as talking back to him. He imagines that Sarath's body is conveying recognition of Gamini's pain and suffering, and in attempting to create a moment of mutual recognition with his dead brother, Gamini sees himself as creating a "*pietà* between brothers" (288).

In discussing Ondaatje's use of the *pieta*, Chu says:

The term "*pieta*," meaning pity, conventionally refers to artistic depictions of Mary, and sometimes others, contemplating the broken body of Jesus. Such works may invite viewers to contemplate Mary's sorrow, her compassion for Christ's suffering, or for the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice and compassion. *Anil's Ghost* invokes the *pieta*, the Buddha, and the sacred eye-painting ceremony *netra mangala* to focus attention on the process of contemplating suffering deeply, even spiritually, in a variety of

contexts divorced from Christian and Buddhist theology. In the end, it suggests that the heartfelt engagements with suffering and injustice marked by pietiesque tableaux are the only possible seeds for survival, community, or social justice. (Chu 97-98)

Gamini's experience with Sarath is given more weight by comparing his contemplation of Sarath's broken body to the contemplation of Christ's broken body by Mary and others. Artistic pietas often focus on Mary holding or touching the body of Christ. In Gamini's conception of the pieta, touch is central:

He recalls the sexual pietà he saw once. A man and a woman, the man having come and the woman stroking his back, her face with the acceptance of his transformed physical state. . . There were other pietás. The story of Savitra, who wrestled her husband away from Death so that in the startling paintings of the myth you saw her hold him. (288)

Even though Sarath dies, Ondaatje offers hope. He offers the hope that in the midst of violence that people can form communities and find healing through physical "heartfelt engagements with suffering" (Hillger 216). Ondaatje uses the figure of the peità to convey that communication can happen through physical touch and to show the power of moments of reciprocal recognition even in circumstances where it reciprocal recognition appears impossible.

Just as Gamini is initially alienated from his brother, Anil is initially alienated from Sri Lanka. With her global traveling, she has lost a sense of the Sri Lankan aspects of who she is. When she returns to Sri Lanka, it does not feel like a return home. In fact, she initially misses the West when she is in Sri Lanka. When asked what she likes about the West, Anil replies, "Oh—what do I like? Most of all I think I like that I can do things on my own terms. Nothing is anonymous here, is it. I miss my privacy" (72). However, the individual she is talking to is "totally uninterested in this Western virtue" (72). Anil has embraced the Western virtues of individuality and does not like

what she sees as the more communal culture of Sri Lanka. She is alienated from Sri Lanka to the point that instead of seeing coming to Sri Lanka as a return home, she sees it as an unfortunate temporary leave of absence from the West. This alienation from Sri Lanka and her Sri Lankan identity is seen, as has been shown, on the linguistic level in that she no longer speaks Sinhalese fluently, but it is also revealed on the physical level. She reacts negatively physically to being back in Sri Lanka. It is too hot for her and the sun causes her to have headaches (60). Also, in her teens in Sri Lanka she became famous for being a swimmer, and when she returns to Sri Lanka, people identify her as a swimmer. However, when in the West and when she returns to Sri Lanka, she refuses to be known for her physical prowess as a swimmer, and instead wants to be valued for her intellect (16-17).

Because she has denied the physical side of her identity, she has to find herself by first becoming aware of her own body, similarly to how she has become aware of and connected to the bodies of others. Because she has denied the importance of swimming, it is significant that one of the first times she becomes re-aware of her body in the novel is when she goes swimming for the first time since she has been back to Sri Lanka. Sarath convinces her to swim in a river with him as they are driving back to Colombo after finding Sailor. After this swim she notices:

The brightness on her skin caused by the river's coldness stayed with her during the last leg of the drive—small bumps of flesh on her forearm, the subliminal hairs upright. They had walked up the slope into the heat and light and she stood by the van drying her hair, beating it gently with her hands. (48).

She notices the effect of the river on her body. Before this experience, she hardly notices her own body. After this experience, Anil constantly notices her physical reaction to her environment and others.

This physical awareness most significantly happens when she dances by herself in the rain while listening to music:

It is wondrous music to dance alongside—she had danced to it with others on occasion of joy and gregariousness, carousing through a party with, it seemed, all her energy on her skin, but this now is not a dance, does not contain even a remnant of the courtesy or sharing that is part of a dance. She is waking every muscle in herself, blindfolding every rule she lives by, giving every mental skill she has to the movement of her body. (181)

Anil's dance becomes more than a dance because she is not doing it for or with anyone else. It is just for her, and it is a way for her to discover and awaken who she is. The person she awakens is one she has kept hidden. As she dances, Sarath secretly watches her dance and thinks, "He watches a person he has never seen. A girl insane, a druid in moonlight, a thief in oil. This is not the Anil he knows" (181). The dancing wakes up Anil's passionate spontaneous side. This is an aspect of herself that she keeps hidden, even from Sarath, through the mask of the rational scientist. As Sanghera points out, "this Anil, who studies the bones of others, finally turns to her own body and locates a curve within her and in locating it, she becomes that curve" (89). She finds knowledge in her body, which she could not gain dispassionately studying the bones of the dead and which goes against the label of forensic anthropologist.

In the estate, a community forms between Anil, Sarath and Ananda. Homi Bhabha points out the importance of community in resistance:

Hybrid agency finds their voice in a dialect that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside; the parts in the whole. (34)

Members of minority groups can find and form groups in spaces not completely controlled by the dominant culture. These spaces allow people to construct voices and communities that allow them to express their agency and minority positions. This is what happens with Sarath, Anil, and Ananda. Even though they are not minorities, they form a community that is separated, at least partially, from cultural influences. This closed setting allows them to form the physical connections that allow them the agency to ask questions about identity and to start gaining a little understanding about those questions.

And Anil gains understanding about her identity through her time at the isolated estate. Soon after Ananda touches her, Anil thinks, “She was with Sarath and Ananda citizenized by their friendship” (200). She is reconnected to Sri Lanka through the connections she has made with Ananda and Sarath in the isolated estate. Later on when Sarath witnesses Anil defend her findings in front of government officials, he thinks, “it was a lawyer’s argument and, more important, a citizen’s evidence; she was no longer just a foreign authority. Then he heard her say, ‘I think you murdered hundreds of us.’ Hundreds of us. Sarath thought to himself. Fifteen years away and she is finally us” (271). Through moments of reciprocal recognition she experiences in Sri Lanka, she is once again a citizen of Sri Lanka. Despite Anil changing and healing through these connections, Anil’s story ends with her asking if this change will last, as she gets ready to leave Sri Lanka and return to the United States. Anil wonders if she will be changed forever through her physical experiences in Sri Lanka or if she will revert to her former

attitudes when she returns to the United States. As she is about to leave Sri Lanka, she thinks to herself “if she were to step into another life now, back to the adopted country of her choice, how much would Gamini and the memory of Sarath be a part of her life? Would she talk to intimates about them, the two Colombo brothers?” (285). The novel may ask how her Sri Lankan experiences will continue to affect her, but it is clear that at least briefly she has been changed by her experiences. She now thinks of her life in the United States as “another life” that is removed from her current life in Sri Lanka. While the question of how profoundly her experiences in Sri Lanka will continue to influence is left unanswered, through the title *Anil’s Ghost*, Ondaatje suggests that the effect will be prolonged. The meaning of the title becomes clear near the end of the novel when after Sarath dies Ananda thinks, “He and the woman Anil would always carry the ghost of Sarath Diyasena” (305). Ananda makes it clear that Sarath is Anil’s ghost. Sarath as a ghost encapsulates Anil’s memories of her experiences in Sri Lanka and how they changed her and implies that they will continue to affect and haunt her.

These powerful interpersonal connections Ondaatje describes are not only created through touch. They also happen as someone is able to recognize another individual’s pain and sorrow in another person’s body language and communicate in turn recognition of that pain through body language. For example, Anil remembers her work in Guatemala identifying bodies of people who had been abducted and murdered. While working, she notices a Guatemalan woman whose husband and brother had been abducted who is waiting to see if any of the skeletons would be identified as them:

There are no words Anil knows that can describe, even for just herself, the woman’s face. But the grief of love in that shoulder she will not

forget, still remembers. The woman rose to her feet when she heard them approach and moved back, offering them room to work. (6)

Although Anil has no words, body language can be a form of communication that functions even when there are not words. Anil feels a connection with the Guatemalan woman even though she cannot verbally communicate with her. She interprets the grief in the woman's body language, and Anil recognizes the woman's pain.

Ondaatje, in critiquing labels, frustrates the attempts of readers to label *Anil's Ghost*. Initially, Ondaatje seems to be constructing a stereotypical narrative, but he then frustrates this expectation. As Cusk states:

Her [Anil's] return to Sri Lanka thus has all the hallmarks of "personal quest" literature: a search for roots, memory and fulfillment. The novel sets out to confound her, and our, expectations. In Sri Lanka, she quickly finds herself among people who live and die for their work, who labour in an atmosphere of political terror, bloodshed and mortal danger. Her plans to make contact with family connections fade away. Instead, she determines, following a different but equally American narrative tradition, to expose governmental corruption by proving that a skeleton she has found in an ancient burial site is in fact that of a recent victim of a political murder. In this, too, she is confounded: naive, schooled in the redemptive mythology of the west, she condemns to suppression that which she seeks to expose. (55)

Ondaatje sets the reader to expect a "personal quest" narrative. However, Anil's quest is frustrated, and thus, the expectations of the audience are frustrated. Anil does not achieve her goal to articulate the violence of the Sri Lankan Civil War in a way that would be meaningful to the United Nations. Anil does not even come away with a clear sense of who she is, just with more questions. Ondaatje is trying to force the readers to question their expectations for a clear resolution and clear labels.

Ondaatje further confounds his readers' ability to label the novel through his manipulation of structure and style. Anil's experience with the Guatemalan woman is the

first of several short italicized sections. No background information is given for these sections; and there are not even page numbers for many of them, while there are page numbers given for most of the rest of the novel. These sections are from the point of view of different characters, although from whose point of view is not always clear, and they are not in chronological order or tied into the main narrative. These passages focus on personal experiences of violence and making connections with others often physically. These fragmented sections and some of the short non-italicized sections present personal experience through gestures and images (Scanlan 306). These are also the sections that focus most directly on indigenous people, though these sections present indigenous peoples in fragments, focusing on the body. These passages often do not even provide names. This can be frustrating for a reader who wants to know what is going on and wants to easily label the narrative, but in doing this Ondaatje is commenting on the nature of truth. Truth is not something easy to find and is usually not found in coherent forms. Instead, it is found in fragments, and individuals need to make their own meaning out of these chaotic fragmentary pieces of truth and should not rely on the coherent narratives and discourses others attempt to force upon them.

These italicized sections are especially difficult for contemporary readers because according to Minoli Salgado we live “at a time when contexts have increasingly come to be defined for us” (Writing Sri Lanka 136). We are imprisoned by the meanings others provide us with, often through names. Salgado maintains that Ondaatje in his fiction is combating this imprisonment through definition by creating “creative uncertainty” (Writing Sri Lanka 136). Ondaatje’s italics passages create creative uncertainty. By refusing to clarify what is actually happening in these scenes, the readers are forced to

creatively construct their own meanings out of these scenes without having them already defined for them. The readers are not given the clues necessary to readily stereotype the characters. The reader is then able to form meaning without the stereotypes and to question the epistemological categories they have been given.

The first italicized section covers Anil's experiences in Guatemala, which have previously been discussed. It is placed right after an epithet from a Sri Lankan miner folk song. The second italics section consists of Palipana telling an unidentified "them" that a panorama of Bodhisattvas was cut out of a Buddhist cave temple in Sri Lanka and sold to museums in the West. He says, "This was the place of a complete crime. Heads separated from bodies. Hands broken off. None of the bodies remained—all the statuary had been removed in the few years following its discovery by Japanese archeologists in 1918" (12). This act is called a crime, and the violence of it is highlighted by calling the statues bodies. This section occurs before Palipana, an archeologist and Sarath's former teacher, is introduced in the main action of the novel. No information is given about Palipana only that "Palipana told them" (12). The "them" is not identified, but from the rest of the novel, it can be inferred that it is Anil and Sarath. The third italicized section tells the story of a man throwing a government official off of a train in a dark tunnel close to Kurunegala. The man and the government official are never named, the man's motivations are not discussed, and this story is never referenced in the main action of the novel (31).

The fourth italicized section randomly includes information from *The National Atlas of Sri Lanka*. The end of the section covers what is not included in the Atlas, focusing on what is not named: "There are no city names. . . There are no river names.

No depiction of human life” (40). Ondaatje is making it clear that he is not against all names. His concern is practices that erase humanity. This can come through labels that objectify individuals, or through not including names at all. The fifth italicized section describes Ananda’s life as a gem mineworker and a drunk (91-93). Again, this is before Ananda is introduced in the main action of the novel. The sixth italicized section describes Sirissa, Ananda’s wife, seeing the heads of students on stakes outside of the school where she works (172-175). No reasoning or specific details are given about this act of violence. It is not even made clear if this event happens right before she disappears or is connected to her disappearance. The sixth italicized section presents a discussion between Anil and Gamini in which he confesses that he had an affair with his brother’s wife. He then discusses how he was in the hospital when his brother’s wife was admitted after trying to commit suicide. He tries to save her but fails. Anil wants Gamini to tell him the name of the woman he is discussing, but he refuses to asking, “what would you do with her name? (253). This is a question Ondaatje is continually asking. What do Westerners and those influenced by the West do with the names of the indigenous. Ondaatje connects naming with the problematics of the West attempting to speak for indigenous populations in the third world. It is left unclear when during the course of the novel that this discussion between Anil and Gamini occurred. The seventh section is a letter Anil writes to the director of *Point Blank* asking where on his body Lee Marvin, one of the actors in *Point Blank*, was shot (258). These sections seem to be included at random and have no direct bearing on what is happening in the main action of the novel right before and after the sections. However, these passages are essential to developing the themes of the novel.

Besides using fragmentation to make knowledge and perspective decentralized, Ondaatje also makes his narrative fragmented to focus on the physical and emotional scars violence has left on individual bodies. According to Wendy Knepper:

While the classical novel often aspires to wholeness and to order, the question is whether such an outcome is either possible or ethically desirable in the postcolonial society or crime novel. Mirroring the body of the victim as well as the postcolonial society itself, the postcolonial postmortem typically bears its scars and seams for all to see who would look more closely at the social or textual body. By pursuing strategies of disorder, dissection, defacement, and digression, the reader is often left with a sense of incompleteness and fragmentation (38).

Ondaatje makes his novel fragmented because there are no easy and complete answers to the questions he is asking, and wholeness is not possible or desirable in the Sri Lankan context. Even though physical interaction can induce healing, this healing is incomplete and does not erase the memory and reality of violence. The fragmentation makes the reader aware of scarred individuals who may be left out of ordered, classical novels. These scarred individuals are fragmented themselves. Specifically, Anil is a fragmented individual. Anil's identity has been shaped by influences from Sri Lanka, Great Britain and the United States. These various influences leave her identity fragmented. This fragmentation is seen by how Anil is presented in the novel: "her confessions and interior monologues are composed of fragments" (Knepper 48). Although physicality leads to understanding and healing, scars and fragmentation still exist in Anil's psyche, especially since Ondaatje questions how much of the understanding Anil gained in Sri Lanka is transferrable to her life in America.

By focusing on the interaction of bodies, Ondaatje is suggesting that knowledge and understanding is produced at the local level. Because individual bodies cannot

interact at the global level, knowledge gained through the interaction of bodies can only exist at the local level, and, therefore, cannot be appropriated by people trying to speak for others on a global level. Anil can't even do this. She would look ridiculous if she told others that she found out who Sailor was by touching Ananda. Likewise, people would not be able to understand her if she tried to verbally explain how she reconnected to Sri Lanka and other people by having others touch her. In trying to speak for others at a global level, she has ignored local knowledge and has isolated herself from the local. As she learns about and through bodies, she is able to connect with others and herself on an intimate level and is able to question her previous desire to speak for others.

The final image of the book focuses on touch. The last line is from the point of view of Ananda as he is looking at Sri Lanka from atop a reconstructed statue of Buddha with his nephew: "He felt the boy's concerned hand on his. This sweet touch from the world" (307). For a book that takes place during the Sri Lankan Civil War, a protracted, bloody, violent war, it is surprising that the book ends with a note of hope (Davies 241). While Ondaatje ends *Anil's Ghost* with an image of hope, he does not propose an explicit concrete solution for the civil war. In fact he is critical of people outside of Sri Lanka who try to speak for Sri Lanka and try to posit solutions for a situation they have not experienced. As Sarath warns Anil, "I want you to understand the archaeological surround of a fact. Or you'll be like one of those journalists who file reports about flies and scabs while staying at the Galle Face Hotel. That false empathy and blame" (44). For Ondaatje, all truth exists in a specific context. This specific context, or archaeological surround, includes the historical, political, and social, including interpersonal interactions. Truth for Ondaatje comes from interpersonal interaction and

not from the authority of the detached observer. This truth that comes through interpersonal connections, such as the connection between Anil and his nephew, brings hope.

Ondaatje's final image suggests the possibility of healing through touch. Peace and understanding comes as a little boy holds the hand of his uncle. Such small gestures of compassion are all the book offers as counterbalance to the grotesque cruelty all around; but in the long run the concern of one human being for another is the only hope we have (Brians 193). Ondaatje in *Anil's Ghost* shows that the postcolonial situation is not one of complete gloom and doom. As individuals form physical relations with others, understanding and healing can come and individuals can finally become free or at least freer from the alienating affects of Western discourses.

Chapter 2 “Building Compassionate Communities through Physicality in *The English Patient*”

Ondaatje has explored the limits of language throughout his career, even when he was known primarily as a poet. In his poem “Birch Bark” from *Secular Love* Ondaatje includes a line which reads, “We are in absolute landscape, / among names that fold in onto themselves.” In analyzing this line, Annick Hillger says, “the expression suggests an inherent emptiness of language itself; in folding in onto itself, language distances itself from the object. There is no relating one to the other. As a means of representation language simply is not what it reflects” (5). Ondaatje continues his exploration of the problematics of language, specifically using language to name, in *The English Patient* and then, as discussed, in *Anil’s Ghost*. In Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, naming is used to exert power and dominance over others. These unequal power relationships lead to alienation. This alienation is compounded by the alienating violence of World War II. The four main characters are isolated from other individuals and influences. However, in this isolation they form a community through establishing relationships built on touch. This community helps the individuals involved overcome alienation. This community is only temporary and dissolves when the outsider world finally intrudes. However, Ondaatje’s characters continue to find strength and meaning in remembering the isolated community and the connections they formed there.

The English Patient takes place in the abandoned Italian villa San Girolamo near the end of World War II. The villa has been converted to a hospital but has been abandoned by everyone except Hana, a nurse from Toronto, and her patient nicknamed the English Patient. The English Patient is found in the desert by Bedouins, and his body

is burned beyond recognition. The Bedouins give him to Allied Forces, and he is eventually shipped to the hospital at the Italian villa. He initially has no memory of who he is. Hana and the English Patient are eventually joined by Caravaggio, a thief Hana knew in Toronto who was a spy during the war whose thumbs were cut off when he was caught, and Kip, an Indian sapper with the British army. All four characters are traumatized by the war, but start to heal through their interactions with each other. Kip and Hana specifically heal each other as they enter into a romantic relationship. The makeshift community at the villa dissolves when Kip hears about the Americans dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Kip first threatens to kill the English patient and then leaves the villa disgusted at all Westerners

Meanwhile, The English Patient slowly regains his memory. It is revealed that he is a Hungarian named Count László de Almásy. He was a desert explorer who had an affair with Katharine Clifton the wife of fellow explorer Geoffrey Clifton, who is English. Almásy had been waiting to be picked up in a plane by Geoffrey and Katharine, when Geoffrey learned of the affair and tried to crash the plane into Almásy. Almásy avoided the crash, but Geoffrey was killed and Katharine was badly injured. Almásy then put Katharine in a cave and walked across the desert to get help. When he finally found the English, they mistrusted him and refused to help. He eventually made it back to the cave, retrieved Katharine's body, puts it into his plane, and accidentally crashed it into the desert, burning him in the process.

The violence of World War II helps to alienate the characters from others. At the beginning of *The English Patient*, Hana is alone at except for the English patient. She sees the villa as "her cell" (7). However, her actual cell is the alienation and isolation she

feels because of the violence and death she has experienced as a nurse during World War II. She is reluctant to interact with others and address her trauma. She is in a time of stasis, and she does not come out of it until others came to the villa and interact with her.

Along with violence, naming leads to the characters becoming alienated from themselves and others. As in *Anil's Ghost*, the characters of *The English Patient* have a predilection for naming and this naming is inaccurate and problematic. The English patient is like Sailor, a victim who needs to be nicknamed and identified. As with Sailor, this nickname is incorrect. The English patient is named the English patient because of his English dress and mannerisms and because he could speak English perfectly (96). However he turns out not to be English at all but the Hungarian Axis spy Count László de Almásy (164) who actually hates the English. Kip is also problematically given a nickname. His real name is Kirpal Singh and he is the only non-English member of his demolition unit. The members of the unit nicknamed him Kip:

The name had attached itself to him curiously. In his first bomb disposal report in England some butter had marked his paper and the officer had exclaimed, "What's this? Kipper grease?" and laughter surrounded him. He had no idea what a kipper was, but the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten. (87)

This nickname is indicative of the attempts of the English around him to colonize him, to make him more English and less foreign. However, as English as he becomes, they never view him as an equal. He is given an English name, but that of a fish and not of something more treasured by the English. At first Kip actively participates in his assimilation into British culture and willingly accepts his nickname. He even prefers it to being called by his last name, a name that connects him to his Indian heritage.

However, the more Kip accepts this nickname and the assimilation that goes with it, the more alienated he becomes from himself and others. In accepting the strange sounding Kip, he is turning his back on his actual name Kirpal and the cultural identity associated with this name. As he takes on an English identity he realizes how ill-fitting this identity is, and he is forced to act in a way, English, which masks important Sikh and Punjabi aspects of his identity which leads to alienation. He is further alienated as he realizes the British will never truly accept him no matter how much he assimilates. At one point Kip thinks, “The English! They expect you to fight for them but won’t talk to you. Singh. And the ambiguities” (188). This alienation is heightened as he becomes more and more dissatisfied with the English and the ambiguities he has to confront when interacting with the English as he sees how barbaric and violent they are despite their attempts to label themselves as civilized. He is disturbed at their wastefulness and observes, “What he saw in England was a surfeit of parts that would keep the continent of India going for year” (188). However, despite his dissatisfaction with the English, he is not able to easily escape the influence of the English and his English nickname, he even introduces himself to the other characters at the Villa as Kip, and thus his alienation remains.

His hatred of the West reaches its apex when he hears that the United States has dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. The English patient becomes the focal point of his anger, and he tells the English patient:

I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from your country . Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. I knew if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I’d be banished. . . You and then the Americans converted us. With your missionary rules. (286)

He realizes that he and others like him have been assimilated, “converted,” by the West. He is ashamed that he had believed in and fought for a civilization which after conquering most of the world would commit the heinous act of dropping an atomic bomb. His realization of the savageness of the West increases his anger and alienation.

Ondaatje focuses on English colonialism by making his most colonialist character, Geoffrey Clifton, English. Clifton is colonialist predominately in his predilection for naming. Geoffrey Clifton while on an expedition trip with Almásy names everything. He names the base camp Bir Messaha Country Club without consulting the other members of the expedition who have been there longer (142). The name is ironic because the desert atmosphere is nothing like a country club. He tries to control his situation and those around him through names and language. He even tries to control his wife through words. He tries to make her love him by constantly praising her, but his praise is meaningless to her (231). Ondaatje through Almásy explicitly connects Clifton to British colonialism. Almásy calls him “a man embedded in the English machine” (237). He was an English spy, and he was mapping and naming spots in the desert to help the English get ready for the war (252). Naming often supports violence because of the power in naming, with which Ondaatje is critical. Susan Ellis in discussing *The English Patient* says, “If the power to name and be named invokes ownership (but also relationship) through the ‘claiming of the powers of the linguistic sword’, a power always exerted by the poet and writer, Ondaatje appears to have introduced a curious reluctance, a hesitation, to wield that sword in *The English Patient*” (27). Ondaatje is even critical of the author’s power to name. Because of how easy it is to misuse this power, Ondaatje is reluctant to overly label. Ellis gives several examples

of Ondaatje's refusal to name in *The English Patient*: "there is a nameless, sacred wind, a nameless desert tribe, a nameless songwriter (109), and a dog at the villa that is never named" (27).

Ondaatje's attitude toward naming is reflected in Almásy. Almásy criticizes attempt by desert explorers like Clifton to name things:

Still, some wanted their mark there. Fenelon-Barnes wanted the fossil trees he discovered to bear his name. He even wanted a tribe to take his name, and spent a year on the negotiations. Then Bauchan outdid him, having a type of sand dune named after him. (139)

This attempt at naming becomes almost a competition for the Westerner explorers. This practice seems ridiculous to Almásy because the desert is constantly changing, and names do not last there. This practice also discounts the Bedouins' place names. As Karen Piper says, "the explorers, who believed with missionary zeal that they were bringing knowledge to the desert, had to first discount local knowledge as illegitimate" (105). They are using names to colonize the desert landscape (Piper 126). Names are a sign of knowledge. European names for desert places acknowledge that Europeans have been to and explored that section of the desert. Ignoring Bedouin place names erases the presence and knowledge of Bedouins for Europeans. Ironically, when the film crew for the movie version of *The English Patient* filmed in the desert of Tunisia, their actions reproduced the colonialist naming of Clifton. Ondaatje in talking about building roads in the desert for the film says:

And to have fine hundred guys building a road in a desert! All these people!" One of the roads was named the "Saul Zaentz Imperial Highway [Saul Zaentz was the film's producer] . . . Everyone who was there wanted to have a road named after themselves. Anthony wanted the Minghella Road. I wanted the Ondaatje Road. (laughs) The road that leads to nowhere. (Kamiya)

Everyone wanted to leave their mark on the desert by having a road named after them, even though the names were meaningless because the roads were abandoned after the movie. It is important to note that the road named after Saul Zaentz included the word “imperial which is closely associated with colonialism. It is clear through the exclamation points, Ondaatje’s laughter, and his desire to build a road going nowhere, that Ondaatje is critical of this desire to have roads in the desert be named after oneself.

The practice of naming is often associated with violence and can be dangerous and lead to death. The English patient soon after he is burned and then captured by Bedouins is forced to say the names of each of the guns in the Bedouins’ arsenal, so they can identify them (20). It is important for the Bedouins to name the weapons to be used to perpetuate violence. Later in the novel, it is revealed that Clifton crashes his plane in the desert right in front of Almásy with Katharine in the cockpit because he knows about the affair and wants to kill the two of them. Clifton is killed instantly, Katharine is badly injured, and Almásy is unhurt. Almásy leaves Katharine in a cave and crosses the desert to get help (256-258). The English won’t help save Katharine, who is injured in the desert because Almásy does not name her as English but instead names her as his wife. The English do not help Almásy because they recognize him as a foreigner and think he is a spy. He admits to Caravaggio that this was a mistake. He should have given the English Clifton’s name, which the English would have recognized as English and would have acted on (250-251). Ironically the English patient was refused help from the English because he was not English. According to Emery, “Katharine died because she was not identified according to her husband's last name, a patriarchal boundary the lovers had swept aside” (112). Almásy instead names Katharine what he wishes she was, his wife.

However, this naming does not make her his wife, does not help him control the situation but leads to a reality in which she can never be his wife. In trying to own Katharine by naming her his, he loses her.

The English will not assist Almásy because they misname him as a spy. Ironically after this renaming, Almásy does become a spy to get back to Katharine's body and to get revenge on the English. However, instead of gaining revenge on the English, he allows them to control his life. Even though the name of spy was originally inaccurate, it has power. Almásy becomes what they call him. Ironically this happens at the very moment he is trying to resist and hurt the English. He eventually has to endure more irony when he, a hater of the English because they would not help him rescue Katharine, is labeled the English Patient

Ondaatje criticizes language and hints at the ultimate disaster which happens because of Almásy and Katharine's affair by having it begin with words. She reads out loud in the presence of both Clifton and Almásy a story from Herodotus about a man who falls in love with a queen and slays the king, on the command of the queen, to be with her. This performance makes Almásy fall in love with Katherine, and he interprets Katharine's performance as an invitation to start an affair; although, later he admits he might have misread Katharine's performance. Almásy says Katharine loved words right before he says she returned to her husband, and he saw this return as a betrayal (238). This juxtaposition connects a love of words with betrayal and deceit.

Ondaatje sets up language as meaningless as Almásy eventually tells his story to Caravaggio, and Ondaatje makes the reader question the validity of this story.

Caravaggio administers morphine and alcohol to Almásy before he has Almásy recount his story (166). Almásy has also been having difficulty with his memory since the accident. His account is even more confusing because sometimes he uses first person and at other times third person. At one point Caravaggio wonders, “Who is he speaking as now?” (244). Caravaggio realizes that Almásy’s narrative is unreliable: “he is still amazed at the clarity of discipline in the man, who speaks sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third person, who still does not admit that he is Almásy” (247). The reader is left wondering how much of Almásy’s story is the ‘truth’ and how much is misremembered or a drug induced illusion. Ondaatje does not give a clear answer. The audience is never even completely sure if the English Patient is Almásy, and Ondaatje questions if language can even provide a clear answer. Ondaatje also questions Caravaggio’s attempts to interrogate Almásy and find out the true story, as Almásy complains, “You must talk to me, Caravaggio. Or am I just a book? Something to be read, some creature to be tempted out of a loch and shot full of morphine, full of corridors, lies, loose vegetation, pocket of stones” (253). Almásy questions Caravaggio’s attempts to get a narrative out of him, to read him like a book, suggesting that, as with naming, the very pact of reading is an act of power, sets up unequal power relationships, and does not lead to healing.

Language is especially meaningless in war. There is no sensible verbal answer for the carnage the characters see, so all language starts to seem absurd. Kip, while at the villa, remembers reading a passage from one of the update kits for bomb disposal units back when he was a sapper in Great Britain. It said:

When is explosion reasonably permissible?

If a man's life could be capitalized as X, the risk at Y, and the estimated damage from the explosion at V, then a logician might contend that if V is less than X over Y, the bomb should be blown up; but if V over Y is greater than X, an attempt should be made to avoid explosion in situ. (212)

Kip finds the clipping ridiculous and wonders who could write so dispassionately and objectively about risking a man's life. Because language is so meaningless, the characters find it an inadequate tool for articulating the violence they experience during the war. Hana refuses to write to her stepmother because she "is unable to write to her now, after all that has happened to her. She cannot bear to talk of or even acknowledge the death of Patrick [her father]" (92). Hana finds it impossible to write about the violence she has experienced and how it continues to affect her, so she does not write. Caravaggio sitting alone thinks, "He had lived through a time of war when everything offered up to those around him was a lie" (117). The war has made the characters mistrustful of language and alienated from themselves and others.

Part of the reason why Hana is so enthralled about the English patient is that he is nameless (52). He is just a body that she can interpret in ways that are useful to her. She even calls him "a pool", someone she could look into and see her reflection in (41). According to Carla Comellini, "The patient's body is the visible and tangible container of those aspects related to the unconscious sphere" (190). She can play out her unconscious desires onto his body; he becomes what she needs. For instance, Hana mentions how Almásy reminds her of her father, who was killed in a fire during the war. Hana interprets Almásy's body as a surrogate father to fill the hole her father's death left.

Hana connects to Caravaggio physically rather than through language. Hana realizes that the only way to make Caravaggio seem real and constant is through touch:

She thought about Caravaggio—some people you just had to embrace, in some way or another, had to bite into the muscle, to remain sane in their company. You needed to grab their hair and clutch it like a drowner so they would pull you into their midst. Otherwise they, walking casually down the street towards you, almost about to wave, would leap over a wall and be gone for months. As an uncle he had been a disappearer. (48).

If she does not physically touch him, form a connection, he might disappear forcing her to question his reality and tangibility. Physicality not only makes others real, it makes the violence real and tangible, and as something tangible, it becomes something that can be overcome. Wlad Godzich says, “We suffer in our bodies, not in representations of our bodies” (Borch xviii). The characters in *The English Patient* recognize the violence done to others and themselves through touch.

And through this touch and connection, they are able to deal with their own violent pasts. For example, Caravaggio’s thumbs were cut off when he was discovered to be a spy. Hana examines his hands and notices, “His hands held together like a human bowl. She reaches for them while her face goes up to his cheek, then nestles in his neck. What she holds seems firm, healed” (54). Hana recognizes Caravaggio’s pain as she touches him. She sees Caravaggio as healed, but this recognition comes only after she touches him, and it seems as though her touch helps in this healing process. The violence of the war has also affected Hana. As a nurse, she has seen hundreds of soldiers, including her own father and the soldier she was engaged to die. Caravaggio also sees the effect violence has had on Hana in her body, “When he had first seen her after all this time she had looked taut, boiled down to just body enough to get her through this efficiently. Her body had been in a war and, as in love, it had used every part of itself”

(81). Hana starts healing when others enter the villa and physically disrupt her solitude with the English patient.

This healing is encapsulated in this thought about the villa by Caravaggio, “But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defense but to look for the truth in others” (117). Caravaggio finds identity in the physical, in shedding skins and masks. Truth was to be found in the other individuals in their little community. Ondaatje constructs the villa to be the perfect setting for an isolated close-knit group to form. The villa is separated from the outside world, in part, in the way it is painted. The walls are painted with trees giving it the appearance of a paradise, an oasis amidst the war where the main characters can heal. This illusion isn’t perfect, since some of the walls have been blown away by bombs and the villa is surrounded by unexploded bombs and mines. However, as Kip comes and takes away the bombs and starts to love Hana, the villa becomes an actual paradise and not just a painted one. Within this paradise, Hana is able to look at even Caravaggio from a different perspective. Even though Hana has known Caravaggio most of her life, she notices things about him in this villa that she had missed before: “In his graying subtle-beard, in his dark jacket, she sees the Italian finally in him. She notices this more and more” (40). Hana is able to notice more because according to Caravaggio, “there is hardly a world around them and they are forced back on themselves” (40). Hana, Kip Caravaggio and the English patient no longer have the distractions and interpretations of the larger world and are able to more fully concentrate and interpret each other’s body language and in this small makeshift community.

Moments of reciprocal recognition through touch is also vital in forming this community. This is seen in a scene where the characters pass a ladybug to each other through touch:

Hana meets him [Kip] on the terrace, and he takes her hand and holds it against his. The ladybird circling the nail on his small finger quickly crosses over onto her wrist. She turns back into the house. Now her hand is held out in front of her. She walks through the kitchen and up the stairs. The patient turns to face her as she comes in. She touches his foot with the hand that holds the ladybird. It leaves her, moving onto the dark skin. (207)

In this scene, the characters touch each other and pass something to each other. Kip catches the ladybird, or ladybug, and passes it Hana as he touches her hand. Hana then goes to the English Patient, touches his foot, and the ladybird is transferred from her hand to his foot. The ladybird as part of the physical world symbolizes life and renewal. As the characters touch each other, they become alive and hopeful. The deadness and despair of the war slowly dissipates. As they heal each other, the bonds between them grow and the community becomes tighter knit. The characters realize that it is their connections with others that keep them human. The community is also strengthened as they physically save each other. As Susan Ellis points out, “Almásy exists literally because of his connections with others (he would die without their presence, especially Hana’s)” (26). The English Patient would have died without Hana’s care.

Kip saves Caravaggio in a more dramatic fashion:

In the library the fuze box is in midair, nudged off the counter by Caravaggio when he turned to Hana’s gleeful yell in the hall. Before it reaches the floor Kip’s body slides underneath it, and he catches it in his hand. Caravaggio glances down to see the young man’s face blowing out all the air quickly through his cheeks. He thinks suddenly he owes him a life. Kip begins to laugh, losing his shyness in front of the older man,

holding up the box of wires. Caravaggio will remember the slide. He could walk away, never see him again, and he would never forget him. (208)

Caravaggio realizes that Kip has saved his life by not letting the fuze box drop and detonate a bomb. He knows that Kip's actions have connected him to Kip, and he will never forget Kip. What Caravaggio will remember most about Kip is his slide—the physical act that led to Kip saving his life. Most of the book is written in past tense. However, this is one of the few passages that is written in present tense. The present tense emphasizes the danger, immediately, and importance of the situation. Near the end of the book when Kip is about to leave the villa because of his anger over the United States dropping the Atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Caravaggio hugs him: “Caravaggio came up to him and put his arms around him. A great hug. The sapper felt the stubble against his skin for the first time. He felt drawn in; gathered into the muscles” (289). Ondaatje makes it clear how important this “great hug” is. Caravaggio and Kip are more firmly connect to each, “drawn in” through this hug. Through the hug, Caravaggio is conveying his love for Kip and him recognition of Kip's pain and subjectivity. Through this hug, Caravaggio seems to understand Kips “position, hates the cause that disconnects them all, and try to cross the boundary Kip has constructed” (Kranz 105)

Ondaatje also makes it clear that Hana and Kip are connected together even after they end their relationship and go their separate ways. The last paragraph of *The English Patient* reads:

And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair.
Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges.
Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from

the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles. (301)

Even though Hana and Kip are living separate lives on separate continents, she in Canada and he in India, at the end of the novel, Ondaatje continues to connect the two physically. Hana knocking a cup off of the cupboard is connected to Kip catching a fork and it is almost as if one caused the other.

Hana and Kip form a romantic relationship from a shared need to touch and connect to something human. Their relationship starts ironically with violence. Their lives are threatened by an unexploded bomb that Kip is barely able to disarm. Ironically even though the violence of the war has deadened and alienated them from others, this shared experience connects them together and makes them desire life (102). Kip's attitude toward Hana changes after this experience:

He would be pregnant with her. When he worked, clarity and music filled him, the human world extinguished. Now she was within him or on his shoulder, the way he had once seen a live goat being carried by an officer out of a tunnel they were attempting to flood. No. That wasn't true. He wanted Hana's shoulder, wanted to place his palm over it as he had done in the sunlight when she slept and he had lain there as if in someone's rifle sights, awkward with her. Within the imaginary painter's landscape. He did not want comfort but he wanted to surround the girl with it, to guide her from this room." (114)

He is now consumed with a physical desire to touch and care for her. He wants to escape the violent world of the war and enter the peaceful world of the painter's landscape with her.

The relationship begins with the physical, and the physical is always important. Hana is constantly noticing and admiring aspects of Kip's physicality: "his head goes into that gesture she loves which is partly a nod, partly a shake of possible disagreement"

(225). They find comfort in lying beside each other and touching: “All evening his thin face lay against her ribs. She reminded him of the pleasure of being scratched, her fingernails in circles raking his back. It was something an ayah had taught him years earlier. All comfort and peace during childhood, Kip remembered, had come from her”

(225). Through Hana’s touch, Kip is reminded of the peace and comfort he gained through touch in his childhood and regains some of that peace. At a young age, Kip had learned the importance of the physical in connecting with others:

Only once did he feel he had given her back any comfort, though she already understood his love for her. When her [his ayah] mother died he had crept into her room and held her suddenly old body. . . He was behind her hunched-over body, his nine-year-old hands on her shoulders. (226)

Just as Kip had been able to comfort his Ayah, Kip and Hana comfort and heal each other through touch. Hana is not only able to give him comfort through touch, she is able to understand and “read” him through touch. She touches Kip’s body and, “everywhere she touches Braille doorways. As if organs, the heart, the rows of rib, can be seen under the skin, saliva across her hand now a colour” (270).

Kip is also able to understand Hana and others more through interpreting their body language than with verbal communication. Specifically, he learns much about people from watching their mouths: “mouths reveal insecurity or smugness or any other point on the spectrum of character. For him they are the most intricate aspect of faces. He’s never sure what an eye reveals. But he can read how mouths darken into callousness, suggest tenderness” (219). Kip, out of all of the characters, is most aware of the power and importance of physical connections with others. After he has just disarmed a complicated bomb with the help of fellow sapper Hardy, he thinks, “Only

Hardy, he realized, keeps me human now” (216). He recognizes that it is only his connections with others that make it possible for him not to become overwhelmed by the horrors of war. Human contact is so important to Kip that he tries to find a substitute for it when he cannot form relationships with those around him:

Every night he had walked into the coldness of a captured church and found a statue for the night to be his sentinel. He had given his trust only to this race of stones, moving as close as possible against them in the darkness, a grieving angel whose thigh was a woman’s perfect thigh, whose line and shadow appeared so soft. He would place his head on the lap of such creatures and release himself into sleep. (104)

Kip, during this time, could not find someone to form a physical relationship with, so he sought comfort in statues—representatives of humans that were still physical, something tangible that could be touched. Both Hana and Kip are masters of the physical, and this knowledge enters into their relationship and leads to mutual healing and understanding.

Whereas the physicality of Hana and Kip’s relationship leads to understanding, Almásy and Katharine’s relationship underscores the dangers and limits of physicality. Almásy tries to control Katharine physically, to claim her as his through sex, rather than to heal her. For instance, Almásy “slides his open palm along the sweat of her shoulder. This is my shoulder, he thinks, not her husband’s, this is my shoulder” (156). Her shoulder becomes his shoulder. In thinking this, Almásy mirrors Clifton’s colonial tendencies by attempting to turn her into an Other into which he can displace his needs onto. He does a similar thing with language when he calls her his wife to the British. Because of Almásy’s desires to possess, he never understands Katherine. The narrator describes this disconnect, “She sits. Enclosed within herself, in the armour of her terrible conscience. He is unable to reach through it. Only his body is close to her” (157). One of the last things she says to him is “how did you hate me? You killed almost everything

in me” (257). Even though her body is close to Almásy, because each are focused on their own pain and desires, they cannot recognize the pain of the other. Thus, in this instance, physical touch does not lead to mutual recognition. In Almásy’s attempts to control Katharine, he destroys her. Katharine is not blameless herself. She commits several small acts of violence on Almásy, giving him a list of the wounds:

The various colours of the bruise—bright russet leading to brown. The plate she walked across the room with, flinging its contents aside, and broke across his head, the blood rising up into the straw hair. The fork that entered the back of his shoulder, leaving its bite marks the doctor suspected were caused by a fox. (153)

Katharine also is obsessed with ownership and hates that Almásy resists being owned by her and that he randomly disappears into the desert (Piper 114). Ironically, Almásy simultaneously tries to own Katharine and refuses to be owned by her. When Almásy tells Katharine ownership is what he hates the most, she reacts violently and hits him in the face. Violence is associated with their relationship even before they begin the affair. Katharine becomes sexually interested in Almásy after she has a dream about them being together in which “they had been bent over like animals, and he had yoked her neck back so she had been unable to breathe within her arousal” (149). Katharine’s dream connects a violent struggle for dominance with sexual arousal. This is different from Hana and Kip’s relationship, in which two subjects form a physical relationship and start healing as they try to understand and sympathize with another human being who they view as an equal. They more fully become subjects as they interact physically with each other and recognize each other’s physical reality.

Almásy, on the other hand, needs to control Katharine’s body. He returns to the desert cave where he left Katharine three years later to collect her dead body. This

reunion scene focuses on Almásy touching Katharine's corpse. However, Almásy's touch is still possessive: "I approached her naked as I would have done in our South Cairo room, wanting to undress her, still wanting to love her. What is terrible in what I did?" (170). Seeing Katharine's dead body, Almásy still wants to sexually possess Katharine's body. In death Katharine cannot fight back, and Almásy can more fully control what happens to her body. Also Almásy associates Katharine with water: "She was always happier in rain, in bathrooms steaming with liquid air, in sleepy wetness, climbing back in from his window that rain night in Cairo" (170). The Cave, although it is in the middle of the desert, is associated with water because it is cold and is covered in ancient drawings of people swimming. In order to possess Katharine's body, Almásy takes her body out of this world of water into his world of the desert. Katharine obviously did not want to die in a damp cave and being dead does not care about where her body ultimately is interred. Almásy, however, does continue to care about Katharine's body. He undertakes a treacherous trek across the desert so that he can possess Katharine's dead body. This attempt to possess Katharine, like all his other attempts to possess her, is fruitless. He tries to transport her body across the desert in a plane. However, the plane malfunctions, Almásy crashes it, and Katharine's body is destroyed in the crash. (175).

While the community of the villa helps psychologically heal all four characters, the isolation of this community is not permanent, and this community exists only for a short time. The outside world and the discourses of this outside world come crashing in on the members of the villa when news comes that the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. This news causes Kip to realize his difference from the other members of the

community and to leave the villa. He thinks, “He remained the foreigner, the Sikh. His only human and personal contact was the enemy who had made the bomb and departed brushing his tracks with a branch behind him” (105). Kip reverts to an us versus them mentality and disconnects himself from the relationships he formed in the villa and even questions his physical relationship with Hana: “How could he trust even the circle of elastic on the sleeve of the girl’s frock that gripped her arm? Or the rattle in her intimate breath as deep as stones within a river (105). He focuses on her physicality, her touch and breath. Even though her physicality has helped him heal, he begins to question his physical relationship with her because of the immense physical violence caused by the bomb. However, the novel ends with Kip years later in India thinking about the villa, and Hana specifically wondering what she now looks like (301). Even though he rejected Hana, his physical relationship with her and, his experiences in the villa affect and stay with him for years.

Part 2 Shyam Selvadurai

Chapter 3 Overcoming Labels Through the Gaze in *Funny Boy*

Shyam Selvadurai is another Sri Lankan-Canadian author who deals with the problematics of labeling in his fiction. He is of mixed Tamil and Sinhalese parentage and was born in Sri Lanka but has lived in Toronto since 1983. At the age of nineteen, he immigrated to Canada to escape the ethnic riots in Colombo. He published his first novel *Funny Boy* in 1994 and has since published *Cinnamon Gardens*, and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*. Even though he has lived in Canada for over 25 years, Canada overtly plays a very minor role in his fiction. Unlike Ondaatje, all of Selvadurai's novels take place in Sri Lanka and most of his characters are not as transnational as Ondaatje's. It is hard to see how his novels are influenced by his experiences in Canada. However, in his introduction *Story-Walla: Short Fiction from South Asian Writers*, Selvadurai writes:

It is from this space between, represented by the hyphen, that I have written what I consider Canadian novels set exclusively in Sri Lanka. For though the material may be Sri Lankan, the shaping of that material and the inclusion, for example of themes of gay liberation or feminism are drawn from the life I have lived in Canada. Homosexuality is illegal in Sri Lanka and the very real threat of physical violence and intimidation might have stopped me from exploring this theme had I lived there (2)

Even though his novels are about Sri Lanka, because he is writing in Canada and has experienced what he considers to be the more open Canadian culture, he is able to write about a subject, homosexuality, which he would not be about to talk publicly about let alone write about in Sri Lanka. In writing about something that is illegal and not discussed, Selvadurai explores how individuals are labeled as homosexual in coded language and how this affects those who do not have the linguistic sophistication to

interpret these codes. The subtle nature of these sexual labels makes labeled individuals both more and less alienated.

Also, because Canada is removed from the volatile ethnic conflicts of Sri Lanka, it is easier for Selvadurai to write about Sri Lankan ethnic difficulties than it would be if he were living in Sri Lanka. The ethnic difficulties in post-independence Sri Lanka are an inheritance from British colonial rule and discourse. The British emphasized and solidified ethnic differences during their rule of Sri Lanka and the country was governed along ethnic lines. Political representation was based upon ethnicity and not region. One indigenous representative from each of the three main ethnic groups was chosen to be unofficial members of the colonial government system in Sri Lanka. Also, the British made it harder for Sri Lankans to unite in opposition to colonial rule by inciting ethnic difficulties by privileging one ethnic group over the others. Finally, the current labeling practices and the anti-Tamil and anti-Sinhalese discourses have been modeled after the colonialist discourse of the British which Othered all indigenous populations in Sri Lanka. As Shalini Puri says, “A striking feature of the antagonism between a racialized “us” and “them” is that it draws heavily upon the terms of colonial racial discourse, which provides a resonant vocabulary” (172).

While it is clear that colonialist discourse has influenced the current anti-Tamil discourse and labeling, it is more difficult to see how the current anti-homosexual discourse has been influenced by colonialist discourse. Both Sinhalese and Tamil cultural groups were anti-homosexual before Great Britain colonized Sri Lanka. However, while anti-homosexuality is not a legacy of colonialist discourse, using it to construct national identity is. Heteronormative masculinity was encoded into the

language of colonial authority and Western constructions of the nation. When indigenous elites took control of the post-independence government, they adopted this discourse of heteronormative masculinity. Both Sinhalese and Tamil concepts of nationalism were constructed in opposition to both those who were seen as ethnically Other and those who were seen as sexual Others, specifically homosexuals.

Selvadurai in *Funny Boy* does not separate issues of ethnicity and homosexuality. Instead, he shows how his main character Arjie often simultaneously deals with the alienation caused by both ethnic and anti-homosexual labels. But ultimately his characters are able to overcome the alienation caused by both types of labeling through moments of mutual recognition. In fact, it is the moments of recognition with heterosexual individuals who are suffering the alienating effects of ethnic labels that help Arjie realize that just as alienating those who are ethnically different is unjust so it is unjust to alienate those who have a different sexual orientation and do not adhere to heteronormative constructions of masculinity. This realization gives Arjie the strength to accept his homosexual identity despite being given labels that stigmatize homosexuality. Selvadurai provides hope that a new politics of reciprocal recognition through body language can liberate those who are oppressed and open up a liminal space of national identity for those who do not fit into established normative sexual or ethnic categories.

Funny Boy is a Bildungsroman about Arjie, a Tamil boy growing up in Colombo, Sri Lanka in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The novel is narrated by the adult Arjie looking back on his childhood in Sri Lanka. The novel follows his developing understanding of both his homosexuality and of the increasingly violent conflicts between Tamils and Sinhalese. The novel is chronological but episodic. He is six when

the novel begins and sixteen when it ends, but each chapter focuses on a specific event from his childhood. Most of the chapters focus on his relationship with another character. The book ends with his grandparents being killed, and his house being burned down during ethnic riots in Colombo. His family is about to immigrate to Canada, and he has to say goodbye to his first homosexual lover Shehan, a Sinhalese boy around his same age.

The novel is to some extent autobiographical. Arjie grows up in Colombo during the same time period Selvadurai did, and Arjie's experiences with recognizing and accepting his homosexuality, dealing with being stigmatized because of his ethnic identity, experiencing the violence of the Colombo ethnic riots, and having to immigrate to Canada because of the riots are similar to Selvadurai's experiences. However, Arjie should not be taken as a veiled stand-in for the author. Although Selvadurai refers to biographic information in his construction of Arjie, Arjie is a unique character. The most significant different between Selvadurai and Arjie is that Arjie is purely Tamil and not of mixed parentage, which makes his experience with the ethnic violence of the Sri Lankan Civil War distinct from Selvadurai's.

Arjie is trying to come to terms with his homosexuality and ethnic identity in a society which refuses to publicly admit the possibility of homosexuality and similarly initially tries to downplay and cover up the emerging ethnic violence and the role of the government in perpetuating this violence. Selvadurai makes his protagonist a child because children often are powerless and have a low level of linguistic sophistication. The control that adults have over Arjie's life, especially control through language, mirrors the authority the Sri Lankan government has over their subjects and the

power Great Britain had and to some extent still has over Sri Lankans. Arjie's lack of knowledge highlights the subtle use of language to code people as homosexual and to surreptitiously discuss homosexuality. The adults in *Funny Boy* understand this coded language. Arjie as a child, however, does not and becomes frustrated and further confused as he hears homosexuality being discussed in fragments and codes he cannot understand. This frustration is compounded as he simultaneously is confronted with a more explicit anti-Tamil discourse that is difficult to translate.

For whatever reason, Selvadurai has not gained the kind of acclaim that fellow Canadian-Sri Lankan writer, Michael Ondaatje, has received. However, out of all the books Selvadurai has written, *Funny Boy* has gained the most critical attention. Most scholars have focused on the novel's exploration of homosexuality and ethnicity. Scholars such as Raj Rao in "Because Most People Marry Their Own Kind A Reading of Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*," Terry Goldie in *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction*, Mita Bangerjee in "Queer Laughter: Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and the normative as comic," Rajiva Wijesinha in "Oddities and Excesses: Sri Lanka Substantiated by the *Funny Boy*," and Gayatri Gopinath in "Nostalgia Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion" explore the interplay of homosexual and ethnic identity in *Funny Boy*. Bangerjee particularly argues that Selvadurai uses humor to encourage his western audience to question its ideas about queerness and ethnicity. Wijesinha explores how violence is enacted by those in authority against those who do not fit sexual and ethnic norms and how Selvadurai argues for the importance of challenging such abuses of power. Gopinath, through an examination of sexuality and

ethnicity, argues that Selvadurai reworks accepted notions of exile and sexual subjectivity.

Other scholars, such as Rocio G. Davis in *Asian American and Asian Canadian Short-Story Cycles*, Minoli Salgado in “Writing Sri Lanka Reading Resistance: Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* and A. Sivanandan’s *When Memory Dies*,” John C. Hawley in “The Role of Sexuality in Nation-Building: Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*,” Timothy Mo’s *The Redundancy of Courage*” and S.W. Perera In “Some Responses to Colonia/Neo-colonial Education in *In the Castle of My Skin*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Funny Boy*,” while still discussing issues of homosexuality and ethnicity, center their discussions on *Funny Boy* as a Bildungsroman with a child narrator. For instance, Perera uses his discussion of *Funny Boy* as a Bildungsroman to explore the effects of English education in *Funny Boy* and argues that Selvadurai is condemning neo-colonial education. Still other scholars, such as Sharanya Jayawickrama in “At Home in the Nation? Negotiating Identity in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*” and Andrew Lesk in “Ambivalence at the Site of Authority: Desire and Difference in *Funny Boy*” connect their discussions of homosexuality and ethnicity to an examination of Selvadurai’s exploration of the construction of national identities. For example, Lesk looks at how Selvadurai critiques constructions of the nation based on discourses of heterosexual masculinity.

I, like most scholars who study *Funny Boy*, explore issues of homosexuality and ethnicity. However, while most scholars look at homosexuality and ethnicity as identities I look at them as labels. I am not interested in how characters are, or construct themselves to be sexually and ethnically different but how characters are labeled as

sexually and ethnically different and how these labels affect the characters. Also, my approach is unique in that I explore how Arjie is able to overcome the alienation cause by ethnic and sexual labels through moments of reciprocal recognition through body language.

The novel begins when Arjie is six years old. At this time, his siblings, cousins, and he are taken to Arjie's paternal grandparents' house one Sunday a month. Arjie's family calls this monthly visit "spend-the-day." On spend-the-days, Arjie, because of his love of imagination, joins his girl cousins in their game of "Bride-Bride" in which they act out a wedding, while the other boys play cricket. Arjie is usually the one to play the bride and is dressed in a sari, makeup and the other accoutrements of a Sri Lankan bride by the girls. Arjie sees nothing wrong with this dress up. In fact, he is enamored with the spectacle and romance of the mock wedding (4-5). His role as bride is first questioned by a cousin, Tanuja, who has spent most of her childhood in America, a place where homosexuality is not as unspeakable. She is the first to label Arjie as a faggot and proceeds to call him a pansy and a sissy. However, these insults do not offend him or his other cousins because as Sri Lankan children they have not been taught these codes for homosexuality (11).

Even though these insults are ineffectual, Tanuja is still a threat to Arjie's position. She tries to usurp his place as a bride. Using the same technique, he gives her the nickname Her Fatness. However, this nickname is as ineffectual as Tanuja's insults. As Andrew Lesk points out:

The irony in this tag, though, lies in Tanuja's pending challenge to Arjie's leadership, moving from "Her Fatness" to, perhaps, Her Highness. Her contest with Arjie, Selvadurai suggests, derives from her extended Western education in

which she has learned powerful, accusatory terms foreign, literally and figuratively, to young Sri Lankans. (39)

The nickname recognizes Tanuja's power and threat and does not negate it as Arjie intended. Her American upbringing also gives her the power to gain authority and become the dominant figure in the girl's group. She brings her American doll to a spend-the-day to distract the girls from Bride-Bride. When her linguistic sophistication and American dolls do not work, she does something the Sri Lankan raised children would never do, tattler on Arjie to the adults on a rare spend-the-day when the adults are at Arjie's grandparents' house to celebrate his grandmother's birthday. When Tanuja exposes Arjie to the adults in his full bride regalia, he is confused at their response. His uncles and aunts laugh at him, and his dad gets angry. His Uncle Cyril tells his father, "Looks like you have a funny one here" (14). His father then refuses to let Arjie play with the girls, tries to make him play cricket with the boys, and his mother no longer lets him watch her dress. Arjie's father is the character who is the most adamant that Arjie stop exhibiting homosexual "tendencies" and throughout the book attempts to force Arjie to adapt of heteronormative masculine behavior.

However, Arjie initially does not understand the reason his father is angry at him is because he does not view Arjie's behavior as masculine. Arjie does not know what it means to be funny and why it is wrong. Later on he thinks about the situation:

It was clear to me that I had done something wrong, but what it was I couldn't comprehend. I thought of what my father had said about turning out "funny." The word "funny" as I understood it meant either humorous or strange, as in the expression "That's funny." Neither of these fitted the sense in which my father had used the word, for there had been a hint of disgust in his tone. (17)

Arjie is frustrated that he is provided no context in which to understand his Uncle's use of funny. His father's reaction leads him to understand that funny in this instance does not mean what it normally means. As a Sri Lankan six year old, he has not been taught that it is a euphuism for homosexuality. He is being labeled as a homosexual or as a potential homosexual before he even knows what homosexuality is. As his behavior is labeled as homosexual, and therefore deviating from established norms, this behavior becomes punishable. He is no longer able to play with the girls or watch his mother dress. These punishments alienate him from others. He can't play with the girls, and he refuses to play crickets with the boys because he doesn't like sports. He is forced to spend his spend-the-days alone cleaning his grandmother's house. He is also alienated from himself. He is forced to hide his love of imaginative play and feminine cloths. What frustrates Arjie the most is that people label his behavior as digressive and punishable without telling him why. In fact, his parents do not articulate it as a punishment; they just will not let him do what was permissible before, making it clear he has somehow done something wrong (17). He sees his punishments as unfair and unjust. This initial reaction makes it easier for him to see the cruelty and unfairness behind slang terms for homosexual such as "funny" and behind ethnic slurs once he gains the linguistic sophistication to understand them.

When he asks why he can no longer play with the girls, his mother says, "because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly, that's why" (19). Here Arjie's mother is implying that homosexuality, which his parent's thinks will be encouraged if Arjie continues to play with the girls, is as impossible as pigs flying. She is attempting to make heterosexual masculinity so normative that deviating from the norm is presented as

impossible. Yet, Arjie's mother's actions contradict her labeling of homosexuality as pigs flying. Even though she implies that homosexuality is an impossibility, she prevents Arjie from participating in certain activities because she is afraid that Arjie will become homosexual. Her words are not as authoritative as she tries to make them. They do not even have authority over her own actions. However, Arjie, who at this point has no understanding of homosexuality, cannot understand the metaphor. The only message he receives is that labels are confusing and not to be trusted.

While Arjie depicts the frustration he felt as a child over his linguistic inexperience, he also nostalgically reflects on the innocence of his childhood. When thinking back about how he used to compare himself to a film star when dressed as a bride, he says, "It was a self magnified, like the goddesses of the Sinhalese and Tamil cinema, larger than life; and like them, the Melina Fonsekas and the Geetha Kumarasinghes, I was an icon, a graceful, benevolent, perfect being upon whom the adoring eyes of the world rested" (5). Even though he is Tamil, he has no issues with admiring both Sinhalese and Tamil film actresses, and the two actresses he names, Malini Fonsekas and Geetha Kumarasinghes, are both Sinhalese. Immediately after this sentence, Arjie says:

Those spend-the-days, the remembered innocence of childhood, are now colored in the hues of the twilight sky. It is a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them. By all of us having to leave Sri Lanka years later because of communal violence and forge a new home for ourselves in Canada. (5)

By juxtaposing this paragraph with his discussion of both Sinhalese and Tamil actresses and by discussing having to leave Sri Lanka because of communal ethnic violence in this nostalgic paragraph, it is clear that the innocence he misses the most is having no

awareness of divisions and violence between Sinhalese and Tamils. This chapter references no instances of ethnic violence or ethnic slurs while every other chapter does. As a six year old, he has been confronted with pejorative labels for sexuality but not for ethnicity.

Arjie's experiences with his Aunt Radha make him first aware of ethnic tensions and labels. But when Arjie first hears about Radha, he feels she will confirm his ideas about romance, and does not realize that she will challenge not support his preconceived notions. Along with doing chores after he is banned from playing with the girls during spend-the-days, he also reads the servant's Sinhala Love Comics. In this setting, he hears that his Aunt Radha, who had been studying in America, is coming home to be married to a Tamil living in America. Even though Arjie has been banned from Bride-Bride, he is still excited about the prospects of a wedding, and the love comics contribute to his excitement. Before he meets Radha, Arjie imagines her wedding following the narrative of the love comics and imagines Radha and her fiancé Rajan Nagendra as the main characters in his favorite love comic (43). Arjie's romantic notions of love embodied in his aunt's upcoming nuptials are first questioned by the physical reality of his aunt: "As I began to polish a lamp, I eyed her and thought of Sakuntala and the other heroines of Janaki's love comics. This was not how a bride-to-be was supposed to behave. It was unthinkable that a woman who was on the brink of marriage could look like this and play the piano so badly" (46). When he first meets her she does not look like the romantic heroine he imagined. She is dark and thin with frizzy hair and is gregarious. Because of this, he is disappointed in her.

However, as he looks more closely at her, he finds a cheerfulness in her that he finds missing in other adults. He comes to fully embrace her as a friend after she dresses him in her jewelry and makeup. Again he forms relationship with others, specifically women, by being physically dressed by them in a way that would be considered transgressive in a public space. He and Radha join the cast of a production of *The King and I*. During rehearsals, Radha becomes close to Anil, a young Sinhalese man who is also part of the cast. Anil also does not fit Arjie's image of a lover: "I found myself thinking of Anil. He didn't fit my idea of what a lover looked like. He was fairly tall and, though not thin, his body was angular and a little awkward. With his large eyes, full lips, and thick, curly hair, which hung almost to his shoulders, he looked like someone too young to be a lover" (66).

Arjie's idea of what a lover looked like comes from written visual depictions of lovers in the love comics. These comics socialize him into adapting normative conceptions of romance. Because both his aunt and Anil do not fit the comics' depiction of lovers, he is surprised when they fall in love. Arjie's least favorite part of many of the love comic is when then parents are against the two lovers getting married. As he is reading this part in one of his favorite comics, he "turned the pages rapidly. The part about asking the parents and their refusing didn't interest me. I wanted to read the inevitable end, about the wedding" (43). He feels the parents' refusal is a minor obstacle in the comic books because he sees the wedding as inevitable. However, the lovers in the comics are always Sinhalese, and the parents' refusals come from economic and not ethnic discrepancies. Arjie is then surprised, and unprepared for by the comics, at what a tremendous issue it is that Arjie's grandmother rejects Anil as a possible spouse for

Radha because he is Sinhalese. Arjie's grandmother gets mad when she learns about Radha's associations with Anil and forbids her from seeing him. It is Radha that introduces Arjie to the word racist. After Arjie's grandmother scolds Radha for associating with a Sinhalese man, Radha labels Arjie's grandmother as a racist. As with "funny," Arjie does not understand the word: "I did not understand the meaning of the word 'racist,' but I could tell that it was not very nice" (58). It is interesting that Arjie is first introduced to new terminology by relatives that have spent time in America where there are not as many taboos about what is said in front of children. Arjie is also unfamiliar with the term racist because his childhood to a large extent is free from racial division and conflict.

This is what perplexes Arjie about the actions and words of his grandmother. Ethnic labels do not fit and overly simplify his family's situation. Arjie's immediate and extended family live in the predominantly Sinhalese city of Colombo, most of his friends and his parents' friends are Sinhalese, and he enjoys watching Sinhalese films and reading Sinhalese love comics. Even his grandmother associates primarily with Sinhalese and speaks Sinhala more frequently than she speaks Tamil. This is the first time that Arjie witnesses his Grandmother enforcing ethnic divisions. Arjie's family is influenced as much, if not more so, by Sinhalese culture and social relationships as they are by Tamil culture and connections. In fact, his family is so concerned that they fit in with the Sinhalese majority that his parents put Arjie and his sibling in Sinhalese and English classes at school and do not teach him to speak Tamil. Arjie does not know why there has to be clear separations between Sinhalese and Tamils in marriage when they did not exist in his everyday experiences.

Selvadurai uses language choice to complicate Arjie's grandmother's racist attitude toward Anil. Selvadurai does not specify which language the two are using to communicate. However, because Arjie overhears this conversation and understands it, they must be speaking in a language Arjie knows, Sinhala or English. Therefore, while Arjie's grandmother is promoting Tamil solidarity by not allowing Radha to date a Tamil, her use of a language other than Tamil shows that her cultural heritage does not consist solely of Tamil elements. By focusing solely on her Tamil ethnicity, Arjie's Grandmother is masked her complex cultural identity.

Arjie's Grandmother is so adamant in enforcing her pro-Tamil discourse onto Radha in part because of the prevalence of both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist discourses in Sri Lanka. Discourses of ethnicity are often used to support discourses of nationalism. Specifically, according to Rob Nixon, "If ethnicity is to be mobilized on behalf of national destiny, cultural differences must be internalized as inbred and inviolate" (77). Discourses of ethnicity are used to legitimize nations by being constructed as biological and thus inbred. It is argued that ethnicity is something that inherently unites a people. A person becomes part of an ethnic group as soon as they are born. Because people are inherently united by ethnicity, it is argued, this group is for all intents and purposes already a nation and should be labeled as such. Therefore, even though culture is a significant component of ethnicity, this component is often erased in many discourses about ethnicity. In the context of *Funny Boy*, which reflects actual practices in Sri Lanka in the 1970-80s, discourses of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms are constructed around concepts of biological ethnicity. A person's ancestry determines whether someone is Sinhalese or Tamil, not the person's culture and language. This is

why Arjie's grandmother only exhibits racism when Radha starts dating a Sinhalese man. Intermarriage makes it difficult to assign ethnicity purely on a biological basis and makes it more difficult to support discourses of ethnic nationalism. While Arjie's grandmother may feel that the boundaries between Tamils and Sinhalese should be weak, she, and many of Arjie's other family members, still believes they should exist. She does not want Radha marrying a Sinhalese because intermarriage disintegrates ethnic boundaries.

Selvadurai interrogates and explores discourses of biological ethnicity and reveals them to be simplistic by constructing Arjie as culturally Sinhalese. In talking about race, Marylynne Diggs says, "The construction of difference as biological, and therefore essentially, pathological, and of difference and pathology as essentially, degenerative, worked as a technology of control and regulation, constituting difference as a shameful secret and thus ensuring self-surveillance" (9). As people label Arjie biologically Tamil, they can label his ethnicity as pathological and deviant. Also, because Arjie's pathological ethnicity is something biological, he cannot change his deviant status, only hide it. This is the strategy of Arjie's father. He attempts to hide his family's Tamil ethnicity from his neighbors by making his family as culturally Sinhalese as possible. Selvadurai questions the legitimacy of this biological discourse. Since Arjie is not culturally Tamil, cannot speak Tamil, and does not feel loyal or proud about his Tamil ethnicity, should he be labeled as Tamil and therefore deviant in the eyes of many Sinhalese?

Even if he should not, Sinhalese around him do label him as Tamil and therefore deviant. The division caused by ethnic labels, especially when his classmates label him as a Tamil and as such will not associate with him, alienates Arjie from others and himself.

Arjie is alienated from himself because people who label Arjie Tamil are attempting to force him to erase the complexities of his everyday life. Even though Arjie is by blood Tamil, he is culturally and linguistically Sinhala. As people attempt to force him to be purely Tamil, they are requiring him to deny an essential part of his cultural makeup. Ethnic labels also alienate him from all Sri Lankans who cannot speak English. Those who label him, including his Sinhalese classmates, do not want him to interact with Sinhalese, and he cannot communicate with Tamils in Tamil. Arjie is frustrated at the separation caused by these labels. He especially condemns using ethnic labels to legitimize violence. His family's house is burned, his grandparents are murdered, and he and his immediate family are forced to immigrate to Canada because they are Tamil. He is forced to leave the country he loves because of an ethnic identity to which he does not feel much attachment.

After his experiences with Radha, Arjie goes to his parents to learn what "racist" means. Arjie's mother explains his grandmother's anger by saying "most people marry their own kind" (53). With the label "their own kind," she is talking specifically about ethnicity. Despite outwardly seeming inclusive, his mother, like his grandmother, has internalized the anti-interethnic marriage discourse. When Arjie asks his father to define racist for him, he does not directly answer Arjie's question and labels ethnic violence between Tamils and Sinhalese as a thing of a past (59). Throughout the novel, Arjie's father refuses to talk about ethnic conflicts and refuses to admit that the situation is as bad as it is. When Arjie's mother tries to talk about the Tamil Tigers with Jegan, the son of Arjie's father's friend, Arjie's father tries to stop the conversation saying, "Chi, chi, chi! No politics" (156). Arjie's father's denial of and refusal to deal with racial tensions

causes Arjie to lose faith in his father. Arjie starts to listen closely to the conversations of adults and discovers for himself that his father is mislabeling the situation and that tensions between Tamils and Sinhalese are a persistent problem.

Arjie experience with verbal labels causes him to feel that verbal language is not to be trusted. For example, one night when Arjie is about 11 years old and is sick, he hears his mother talking with her sister. They are talking about Daryl Brohier, a childhood friend of Arjie's mother who has recently returned to Sri Lanka from Australia. The conversation makes it clear that something had happened between Daryl and his mother in the past. However, when Arjie wakes up the next morning, he thinks, "my fever had abated, and I was no longer sure if the conversation I had heard was real or if it had been a product of my mind" (105). He is not sure if the conversation happened or if he imagined it because he was in a delusional state due to fever. That is how language is treated throughout the book—as something delusional, unreal, and not to be trusted. When his Aunt Radha comes home on a train from visiting Jaffna she is attacked and injured because she is Tamil. The story he hears from Mr. Rasiah, who brought Radha home, seems unreal:

As I sat there on Radha Aunty's bed, I thought of all Mr. Rasiah had said, and found myself wondering how people could be so cruel, so terrible. The scene he had described, the bottles being flung, the beatings seemed unreal. And yet they were real, as I could see before my very eyes (88).

He has trouble believing the story of the attack on the train; the cruelty of it seems unreal. However, he cannot question the physical reality of Radha's wound and bloody bandage. The book constantly reproduces this pattern. Arjie has trouble believing reports of ethnic violence, but he realizes the problem as he is confronted with more and more physical

evidence of ethnic violence such as witnessing a Tamil boy being viciously beat by a gang of Sinhalese boys in the bathroom at school. Through the incomprehensibility and inaccuracies of the labels applied to him and through other experiences, Arjie learns to mistrust language.

Arjie arrives at the point where he has trouble believing most verbal reports. When as a teenager his parents tell Arjie he is going to start attending Victoria Academy, his older brother Diggy, a student at Victoria Academy himself, tells Arjie about the extreme violence the Headmaster, Mr. Abeysinghe uses on students. Describing Mr. Abeysinghe, who is called “Black Tie” because he always wears a black tie, Diggy tells Arjie, “Once, he slapped a boy and broke some of his teeth. Another boy in my class got caned so severely his trousers tore. Then he made the boy kneel in the sun until he fainted” (206). Arjie does not believe him. It seems so extreme that he thinks Diggy is exaggerating (206). But Black Tie actually is cruel. Selvadurai makes Black Tie’s cruelty and dress symbolic. Black Tie is set up to be an analogy to the domination by colonial powers and their continuing influence. Arjie recognizes Black Tie’s attire of a sola topee, a white doomed hat, a pressed white suit, a white shirt and a black tie as belonging to an earlier era, specifically that of when the British ruled Sri Lanka (209). Along with wearing colonialist attire, Black Tie espouses a colonialist discourse and attempts to enforce norms of heterosexual masculinity by beating boys he feels are too effeminate. Arjie is suspicious of Black Tie’s colonialist and of heteronormative discourse as a result of his acquired mistrust of language in general.

Because of Arjie’s aptitude in English, Black Tie has him memorize two late nineteenth century poems by British poet Sir Henry Newbolt entitled “Vitae Lampada”

and the “Best School of All” to recite at an upcoming awards ceremony, which is called a prize-giving. Arjie has problems memorizing the poems because they describe a world so different from his own. “Vitā Lampada” names cricket as a game that teaches one “to be honest and brave and patriotic” (227). Arjie, however, sees that cricket at Victoria Academy promotes dishonesty and a winning by any means (227). In “The Best School of All,” the poet nostalgically saw his school days as the best days of his life and describes private school as a valued institution while Arjie sees school as imprisoning (228). Arjie and his friend Shehan Soyza mock the poet and his worldview, which seem so ridiculous to them. Only by mocking the poems is Arjie able to easily memorize them.

However, Arjie is not able to recite the poems in front of Black Tie for fear of punishment, and Black Tie does cane him when he cannot recite them perfectly (230). Black Tie also beats Arjie’s friend Shehan for having long hair, which Black Tie sees as a sign that Shehan is too effeminate. Black Tie enforces his own heteronormative ideas about masculinity by cutting Shehan’s hair. Arjie finds Black Tie’s punishments unjust and wants to tell his parents about Black Tie’s actions. But Shehan and Diggy just laugh at Arjie’s plan and say it will not change anything. When Arjie does finally go to another teacher, Mr. Sunderalingam, to complain about Black Tie, the teacher does not fully believe him and tries to get Arjie to sympathize with Black Tie. The teacher’s words, however, do not match Arjie’s experience:

Mr. Sunderalingam had said Black Tie was strict but not cruel, but he was wrong. Black Tie was cruel. If not, how could he have made us kneel on that balcony for all those hours, how could he have slapped Shehan for having long hair and then cut off his hair in such a terrible way? (241).

Mr. Sunderalingam names Black Tie as strict. However, Arjie does not accept Mr. Sunderalingam's authority to name Black Tie, and Arjie wishes he had the power to legitimize his labeling of Black Tie as cruel. Even though Arjie does not have the power to name, he realizes he has the power to misname. He decides:

Instead of trying to get out of reciting the poems, I would do them. But I would do them wrong. Confuse them, jumble lines, take entire stanzas from one poem and place them in the other until the poems were rendered senseless. Black Tie, who Mr. Sunderalingam said would write a speech based on these poems, would be forced to make a speech that made no sense. His attempts to win the cabinet minister to his side would fail, he would lose the battle to Lokubandara, be forced to resign, and that would solve things for Shehan. (270-271).

Even with this plan in place, Arjie is nervous and afraid to put his plan in action once he gets to the podium until he sees Shehan's gaze on him and sees Shehan's smile (274).

This moment of mutual recognition gives Arjie the strength to critique the colonial discourse espoused in the poems by misreading them. He jumbles up the two poems rendering them meaningless and in turn renders Black Tie's speech meaningless and makes Black Tie look like a fool.

However, this appropriation of language to achieve Arjie's own ends is not without its negative consequences. After his speech, he looks at his mother and feels sadness. He knows that his family was disappointed and could not understand what he did. He realizes that through his actions he had chosen Shehan and homosexuality over his family, and he "now inhabited a world they [his family] didn't understand and into which they could not follow him" (278). He has also betrays his ethnicity. Black Tie is a Tamil, and Mr. Sunderalingam tells Arjie before he publicly recites the poems, "I have reason to believe our principal is losing the battle [to keep his job as principal], and if he

is overruled, Tamils like us will suffer. Our loyalties must therefore be with him” (240). However, Arjie’s actual loyalties are with the Sinhalese Shehan and not the Tamil Black Tie. He discredits Black Tie knowing full well Tamil students and teachers will suffer because of his actions. Because of his rejection of his family’s discourse about sexuality and race, he becomes alienated from his family when he chooses to be “funny.” However, he has opened up a space for himself where he is comfortable transgressing sexual and ethnic norms.

Arjie’s experiences with Newbolt’s poems show the continued influence of the colonizer. “The Best School of All” names the British private system as an effective tool for socializing boys into proper British gentlemen. “Vitā Lampada” is Newbolt’s most famous poem and discusses how a future soldier learns British stoicism while playing Cricket. It was used as a symbol of British patriotism during World War I. These two poems maintain that there are certain values, that are specifically British, and British boys internalize these values at school. The presence of these poems and a school system modeled on the British system in Sri Lanka are remnants of an attempt to make Sri Lankans culturally British. Even the name Queen Victoria Academy is extremely British. However, the values that these British poems name are not espoused by Arjie and Shehan. Arjie and Shehan transgress the colonial discourse of the British as well as that of the post-independence Sri Lankan elite. Arjie and Shehan voice their refusal of this discourse by laughing at these poems. They ridicule the poems by making comments such as “this fellow really loved school,” “must have been a teacher’s favorite,” and “I bet you anything that he was cricket captain, rugger captain, and tennis captain all in one year” (235). These comments make it clear that the British School system benefits only

those who conform to it, and cannot accommodate those who do not conform to the values names. Arjie, as one of the outcasts, finds it “a relief to be able to hold up for ridicule all that was considered sacred by the Queen Victoria Academy” (235). Black Tie, however, has internalized these values to the point that he dresses like what he thinks a traditional British schoolmaster should. This dress is out of place and uncomfortable in Sri Lanka’s hot weather. Arjie is also able to recognize that Black Tie’s internalization of these British values makes him unjust and harsh.

Arjie is able to recognize and mock the insidious nature of these poems because of his experiences with Western literature in the past. At the start of the chapter about Uncle Daryl, Arjie mentions his love of Western literature. He has read the Famous Five and Nancy Drew books, but his favorite book is *Little Women*, and he wants to read its sequels (99-101). At the beginning of the chapter, Selvadurai makes it seem like Arjie’s love for *Little Women* is a good thing. His father does not like Arjie reading *Little Women* and will not buy Arjie the sequels on his extended trip to Europe because he thinks of *Little Women* as a book for girls and is afraid that reading it will encourage Arjie’s homosexual tendencies (101). Uncle Daryl, on the other hand, encourages Arjie’s love of *Little Women* and even gives Arjie the sequels to *Little Women* (109). At this point, it seems like Selvadurai is using *Little Women* just to help support one of the main goals of the chapter, establishing Arjie’s father as the embodiment of heteronormative masculinity. Arjie rejects and Uncle Daryl (?) as providing a model of masculinity, while not homosexual, does help Arjie question the heteronormative masculinity of his father. His father’s attitude toward *Little Women* reveals him to be harsh and fearful of any

action by Arjie that he does not view as masculine enough. In contrast, Uncle Daryl's attitude shows him to be caring and understanding.

Arjie's attitude toward *Little Women* and Selvadurai's message about it changes over the course of the chapter. Arjie starts to view his life through the lens of *Little Women*. He renames the people in his life with names from *Little Women*: "Amma was Jo, the tomboy, Neliya Aunty was Meg, Sonali was Amy, I was Beth the sick one, and Daryl was Laurie, the boy next door who was in love with Jo. It was Christmas, and all us little women were longing for our father to come home" (115). Later when Daryl is killed while investigating ethnic violence in Jaffna, Arjie changes his categorization of his friends and family as *Little Women* characters: "This time I was Jo and I was nursing Amma, who was Beth. Then Beth died and I awoke to find myself crying as, for the first time, the understanding that Daryl was dead came to me" (134-135). Arjie sees nothing wrong with viewing his life through the lens of *Little Woman*, and this renaming actually seems to help him cope with the changes in his life.

However, at the end of the chapter when Arjie realizes that Daryl's unknown killer will never be brought to justice, he realizes that *Little Women* provided a faulty lens:

I picked up *Little Women* and opened it. It was the chapter called "Pleasant Meadows," where the father of the family comes home and the little women sit at his feet, all their troubles at an end. It was one of my favorite passages, yet reading it now brought me no pleasure. The world the characters lived in, where good was rewarded and evil punished seemed suddenly false to me. My father would soon be coming back too, but our troubles would not be over. (149)

Arjie finally realizes that the world of *Little Women* is not congruent with his world. The justice of the novel did not exist in Arjie's violence filled world. In Arjie's world, fathers

were not perfect and could not fix everything just by coming home. Patricia P. Chu says that Arjie's love of *Little Women* "strengthens his affinity with the ideal heroine of the nineteenth-century classic realist novel" (91). However, the previous passage from *Funny Boy* clearly shows that Arjie has rejected the moral world of *Little Women*. He realizes that it does not translate in his context and he ultimately rejects the ideal of the nineteenth-century novel as an impossibility.

If Selvadurai is critical of language, both oral and written, as a tool for articulating identity, then what is the solution? How can one make sense of the impact of postcolonial violence if cannot be adequately described through language? The answer comes as Arjie observes the relationship between Radha and Anil. Because he has learned not to trust language, Arjie learns to pay close attention to people's body language to determine their actual feelings. Through observing the way they act with each other, he realizes that Radha is in love with Anil before she verbally announces it. Also, he starts to warm up to Anil as he interacts with him on a nonverbal level:

It was during Radha Aunty's absence that I began to really get to know Anil. I was struck by how different he was from men like my father and uncles. His friendliness towards me was casual and effortless, unlike the stiff formality other adults had when they felt compelled to make a gesture of cordiality towards us children (82).

Observing Anil's body language and how he interacts with others physically leads to a moment of recognition in which Arjie realizes Anil's warmth and is able to overcome his prejudice that Anil should look and act like a groom in the love comics. He is also able to realize that Anil is not the monster his grandmother verbally constructs him to be. Arjie is able to see Anil as an individual and not as a Sinhalese, the stereotyped Other that his grandmother, and some of his other family members, sees. While all of Arjie's family

members have healthy relationship with their Sinhalese neighbors, Anil is Othered because his relationship with Radha. Interracial marriage threatens to disrupt ethnic boundaries to a much larger extent than being friends with Sinhalese neighbors. No one in Arjie's family attempts to make friends or is cordial to Anil except for Arjie and of course Radha. Arjie is able to overcome discourses that condemn relationships between Sinhalese and Tamils through the moments of recognition he has with both Anil and Radha.

Anil has such a moment of recognition as he observes and interprets Radha's body language:

Radha Aunty was staring out of the window, a brooding expression on her face. It was only then I realized that Aunty Doris's story had been a warning to her of what the future might hold if she decided to marry Anil. Now it came to me that if she did marry Anil I would never see her again. (80)

Aunty Doris is a family friend who is a Burgher who married a Tamil. Arjie overhears Aunty Doris tell Radha about the difficulties involved entering into an interracial marriage. However, Arjie does not realize the implications an interracial marriage will have on Radha's life until he observes her body language. As Arjie starts to recognize Radha's pain, he takes her hand to acknowledge his recognition and to convey sympathy (80). Arjie has a similar moment of recognition with Anil: "I noticed Anil now. He was leaning on the piano, his hand under his chin. From the expression on his face I could tell that he, too, was missing Radha Aunty. I went and stood by him" (82). Arjie is able to interpret Anil's body language as a sign of his loneliness and is then able to offer physical comfort.

The relationship between Radha and Anil ultimately ends when Radha is attacked by a group of Sinhalese men on a train because she is a Tamil. This causes her to distance herself from Anil, which Arjie recognizes when he sees how coolly Radha treats Anil. Arjie, however, is on Anil's side; he resents the coldness with which Radha treats Arjie after the event, and he realizes that Anil is unfairly being associated with an act of violence in which he did not participate. However, Arjie only recognizes how much Radha's experience on the train has changed her when he closely observes her body language:

She stood looking outside again. The moon seemed to have bewitched the Garden. The grass and the bushes appeared to have melted into one another, as if the moonlight had spread a fine silver netting over them. As I stood watching her in the moonlight I realized that she had changed. There was a seriousness to her face that was new, a harshness that I had never seen before. (90)

Radha in her body language looks different and he recognizes this physical change as an indication of a psychological and emotional change. Before seeing her in the garden, he has tried to deny that his aunt and their close relationship have changed. However by closely observing her physicality, he is able to recognize that a transformation as occurred. Later on, Arjie again connects this change in personality with a change in body language by saying Radha's "eyes had lost their warmth" (95). One thing he recognizes through observing Radha's body language is the injustice of ethnic labels and the violence legitimized by them.

Radha eventually marries the Tamil from America, Rajan Nagendra, that her family wanted her to marry. Arjie finally gets his dream of participating in a wedding. The rest of the family enjoys the wedding immensely. However, even though the

wedding fits the image of his dream wedding, Arjie finds no pleasure in it, leaves before the ceremony is finished, and thinks about the love comics: “I thought of her [the servant Janaki’s] love comics and how fervently I had believed in them; believed that if two people loved each other everything was possible. Now, I knew that this was not so” (97). The moments of recognition Arjie has had with Radha and Anil’s has allowed him to question the heteronormative narrative of the love comics. These moments of realization comes primarily as he observes their body language.

Arjie even has a moment of recognition with his father and finds some brief understanding as he observes his father’s body language. One day during sunset, he is alone outside with his father after his father had an argument with his mother. She wants to immigrate to the West because of the increased racial violence toward Tamils, and he refuses to do so. As he is outside with his father he was “sharing his silence. The sun was declining and a dark blot seeped across the sky, obliterating shades of red and yellow. I looked at the expression on his face, and I felt I understood what was in his heart” (203). Throughout the book, Arjie has a strained relationship with his father, and they do not understand each other. The relationship is strained as Father tries to force on Arjie a heteronormative masculinity, which Arjie rejects. The relationship is so strained that at times Arjie wishes that one of the other men in his life, such as Daryl, was his father. However, this is the one place in the entire novel where Arjie pays close attention to his father’s body language and is the one place where Arjie understands his father. This experience with his dad also happens as the ethnic violence first starts directly impacting Arjie’s family. The change from day to night signifies the approaching violence and struggles the family is about to face as Tamils living in the predominately

Sinhalese city of Colombo. Arjie is able to recognize that things are going to get worse, and he also recognizes why father desire to pretend that the ethnic conflicts are not severe and will die down.

Most of Arjie's understanding of others comes as he observes the body language of others and recognizes their pain and subjectivity. As I have previously discussed, Arjie initially doubts whether the aforementioned conversation between his aunt and his mother even took place. However, later on, he tells his aunt that Daryl had visited again. When he sees Neliya Aunty's facial reaction to this news, he knows for certain that he had not imagined the conversation (107). Arjie can trust body language more than verbal language. He learns more about people through looking at them than he does through talking with them. In fact, he realizes that his mother and Daryl are falling in love again because "they spoke to each other with fewer words and more gestures" (110). Arjie is more comfortable when connecting with people through look and touch rather than words. The book is even structured around the various relationships Arjie develops through observing the body language of others. *Funny Boy* was initially subtitled a novel in six stories, and four out of these six stories deal with the relationships he develops with others, mostly adults. Even though most of the chapters are about relationships with adults, "Each story in *Funny Boy* explores the plight of a character who, if not exactly subaltern, is still relatively powerless vis-a-vis middle class men, especially Sinhalese men" (Kumarage 30). Through observing and interpreting the body language of individuals, Arjie is able to recognize their powerless status, the alienation and pain this powerlessness causes, and the injustice of this powerlessness in relationship to middle

class men. These moments of recognition give Arjie the strength and determination to deal with the injustice and powerlessness of his position as a homosexual and as a Tamil.

Many of the characters Arjie experiences moments of reciprocal recognition with are men. Daryl is one of these men. When Arjie's mother takes Arjie to the country to convalesce, he is at first angry when Daryl comes along, and that he has to share his mother with him. Arjie's attitude changes as he reads Daryl's body language:

The friendly smile and the look of concern on his face reminded me of the day he had brought me those books of how he had read to me while I was sick and had sat by my bed, holding a cold compress to my forehead. Much against my will, I felt my disappointment at seeing him begin to dwindle a little. He held out his hand to me, and I took it as we began to go up the driveway. (112)

Daryl through his smile recognizes Arjie's pain and that he is in need of comfort. As Arjie recognizes in Daryl's smile that Daryl is a kind decent human being his anger dissipates. Arjie notices that Daryl is recognizing Arjie as an individual and is offering comfort in his body language. Arjie accepts this comfort and conveys his own recognition of Daryl by taking Daryl's hand.

Arjie's has similar moments of mutual recognition with Jegan. When he first meets Jegan, Arjie notices,

He was clean-shaven and had straight hair that fell over his forehead and was short at the back. His skin was very dark and had a healthy glow to it. He saw me watching him and smiled. His teeth, like his eyes, were brilliant against his dark skin. I returned his smile shyly (154).

Arjie gazes at Jegan. Jegan recognizes the gaze and acknowledges his recognition with a smile and a bond is formed. Arjie is physically attracted to Jegan and the carefree friendly manner with which comports himself. A friendship eventually develops between

Arjie and Jegan as they continue to have moments of mutual recognition. When Jegan moves into a spare room in Arjie's house, Arjie notices, "the place seems to have become sacred by his presence" (159). Jegan's physical presence has a powerful almost religious effect on Arjie's life. Jegan's presence is sacred because of the reciprocal recognition that happens between the two. The moments of reciprocal recognition he has with men are so powerful that these men become his role models and he starts to compare his father to them. In reference to Daryl, Arjie says:

I found myself observing his high cheekbones and the glints of gold in his brown beard, his thighs and the way they changed color at the edge of his shorts, and his gentle, courteous manner, which seemed to ease something inside Amma, softening her sharp edges. I couldn't help comparing him to my father, who, with his balding head, thin legs, slight paunch, and abrupt way of talking to Amma, cut a poor figure next to him. (113)

Daryl, Anil, and Jegan, are much more attractive in their appearance and mannerism than his father. Because he is attracted to and admires them so much, they become his role models. They, specifically, are his role models of what it means to be a man.

Arjie rejects his father's version of manliness and replaces it with the version of masculinity these more caring men provide. Even though these men are heterosexual, the version of masculinity they present still is different from the masculinity espoused by Arjie's father and school. As Andrew Lesk puts it, "Arjie's sexual identity, which earns him the ascription 'funny,' is doubly conflicted in that he not only does not have the language to access what his desires might mean, but he does not appear to have a local model of 'the homosexual' upon which to draw" (37). Lesk reaffirms the confusion the unspeakable nature of homosexuality in Sri Lanka has on Arjie. However, even though Arjie does not have models of "the homosexual," he does have models of caring men,

which allow him to accept a conception of masculinity that allows a space for homosexuals and ultimately allows him to accept his own homosexuality.

The men that Arjie admires also physically confront ethnic difficulties in comparison to his father, who does not. Daryl goes to Jafna to investigate ethnic conflict despite the dangers and is killed. When a man is illegally plastering posters supporting an anti-Tamil government on Arjie's home, Jegan stops the man, to the admiration of Arjie. These men are compared with Arjie's father who always downplays the ethnic problems and focuses on being quiet and not responding to discrimination. For instance, Arjie's father does not tell his family that their hotel was almost destroyed in the riots using the excuse that, "I never talk about it because I don't want to upset my family" (168). After Jegan physically stops the man from plastering posters, Arjie's father tells Jegan, "One must be careful not to antagonize the wrong people" (165). Jegan is disappointed at Arjie's father's response, and because one of his heroes is disappointed, Arjie is disappointed as well. Jegan feels that one should physically resist oppression. When Jegan is unfairly arrested and labeled in the newspaper as a terrorist Jegan wants to continue to work at Arjie's father's hotel despite the protestations of the Sinhalese employees. Arjie's father, however, wants Jegan to spend a few days in Jaffna until people forget about the affair (181-183). To avoid conflict with his Sinhalese staff, Arjie's father eventually fires Jegan and Jegan then returns to Jaffna. Arjie is inspired by the memory of Jegan and others to resist the cruelty of Black Tie by misreading the poems.

In gazing at men, Arjie finds a way to express his identity. Soon after he meets Jegan, he notices:

Lately, I had found that I looked at men, at the way they were built, the grace with which they carried themselves, the strength of their gestures and movements. Sometimes these men were present in my dreams. I felt the reason for this sudden admiration of men had to do with me distress over the recent changes in my own body, changes I had witnessed in Diggy a few years ago when he, too, was thirteen (158-159).

Gazing at men gives him freedom to express himself. No one is controlling who he looks at. Even if someone noticed that he was gazing at men in an inappropriate way, no one could completely interpret what the gaze personally means. However, if he told someone, such as his father, that he was gazing at men with desire he would be punished. Ironically, Arjie is given more freedom to interpret his actions, dreams, and desires because homosexuality is unspeakable. Because people are afraid to talk openly about homosexuality, no one labels Arjie for gazing at men and admiring their looks. Arjie therefore, is free to interpret his actions as natural. Arjie connects his admiration for men to his puberty, something his heterosexual brother experienced as well. He sees beginning to gaze at men with admiration as part of the natural maturation process. For Arjie, it is as much a part of puberty as the wetness on his sarong. However, he does not have the knowledge to connect his attraction to men to the wetness on his sarong and to understand that his attraction to men is a sexual. Arjie does not have problems with his desires and expressing his desires in his dreams because no one labels them as wrong. Conversely if someone were to label his actions as homosexual, he would feel guilty and feel forced to deny those desires. He would then be alienated from who he wants to be by the person everyone expects him to be.

Arjie's most powerful moments of reciprocal recognition happen with the homosexual Shehan Soyza. Ironically, Arjie meets Shehan happens when his father forces him to change academies because his father believes the new one, Queen Victoria

Academy, with indoctrinate him into accepting heteronormative masculinity. His father makes it explicit that this is the reason why he is transferring Arjie when he says “The Academy will force you to become a man” (205). Arjie’s father’s plan backfires when Arjie meets Shehan the first day of school and is instantly captivated by him. Like his other relationships, Arjie first interacts with Shehan through gazing:

I found myself looking at Soyza often during the classes that morning. Though delicately built, his body was well-proportioned and lacked the awkwardness of most other boys his age. His face was full of contrasts. His upper lip was thin, his lower lip full; his forehead was fine and well-shaped, his eyebrows thick and unruly. Yet the overall effect was attractive. (212)

Shehan’s lack of awkwardness impresses Arjie. This continues to impress Arjie as he continues to observe Shehan and his physical interactions with others. In observing Shehan, he notices, “There was a confidence about him, an understanding of his own power. He was also daring, for, unlike any of the other boys, he wore his hair long” (212). Boys at the school were encouraged to cut their hair short because Black Tie saw long hair as being effeminate. Arjie is attracted by Shehan’s physical confidence. At first Arjie does not recognize its source, but soon he realizes that Shehan’s physical confidence comes from his confidence in his own sexuality. Shehan wears his hair long as a personal sign of his homosexuality. Some days he leaves class to have sex with the head prefect who is homosexual as well. Most of his class, even the teacher, is aware of this but only smirk or ignore his absence because doing anything more would force them to openly discuss homosexuality.

Clearly labeling Shehan as a homosexual would make those in the class confront the fact that there are homosexuals in Sri Lanka and in their very school, something they

are reluctant to admit. In acknowledging Shehan as a homosexual, the head prefect would be acknowledged as well, and this would cause a scandal for the school. Boys treat Shehan as an outcast, but they are afraid of and do not bully him because they are scared by his unspeakable homosexuality. Shehan accepts his own homosexuality and does not care that others label him an outcast because of it. Shehan is able to be confident in his sexuality without fear of reprisals because the unspeakable nature of homosexuality. When people label Shehan as an outcast, they actually are labeling him as a homosexual. However, the label “outcast” does not produce as much immediate censure. He cannot be put in jail for being an outcast while he can for being a homosexual. Arjie’s recognition of Shehan’s confidence and where it comes from gives Arjie the confidence to reject labels discouraging homosexual and interracial relations and participate in a sexual relationship with the Sinhalese Shehan.

Arjie and Shehan’s friendship, even before it becomes romantic, is based on moments of reciprocal recognition. Their first moment of mutual recognition through body language happens as they are at the library researching some English poems and Arjie notices Shehan looking at him: “He smiled tentatively, as if he was not sure that I would return his smile. I felt suddenly shy but, wanting to acknowledge his gesture of friendship, I smiled back” (236). The next day, when Arjie sees Shehan, he says, “We looked at each other and there was, in our silent exchange, an acknowledgement of our newly found friendship” (237). They interpret each other’s body language as a sign of friendship, and thus, form a bond. They recognize and solidify their friendship through gestures of friendship and not words of friendship. In fact, right after this experience, Arjie says, “I kept trying to think of things to say, but nothing came to mind” (236). It is

easier for Arjie to create moments of mutual recognition through body language than through verbal language.

Arjie's sexual attraction to Shehan happens after these moments of reciprocal recognition but first manifests itself unconsciously. Soon after Arjie and Shehan become friends, Arjie has a dream about Shehan:

We were in the Otter's Club pool, swimming and joking around. He was in a very mischievous mood, and every time I spoke to him he answered in Tamil, knowing that I didn't understand. He swam away from me and I chased after him until finally I caught him in the deep end. I wound my legs around his so that he couldn't escape, He splashed water in my face and tickled me, but I would not let him go. I was very aware of the feel of his legs against mine and of the occasional moments when, in trying to prevent him from getting away, my chest would rub against his. The next morning I noticed the familiar wetness on my sarong. (237)

Arjie's dream focuses on his desire to touch Shehan. Even though the activity of the dream, two boys wrestling in a pool, is not inherently sexual, it is for Arjie. Arjie focuses on the minutia of the touch and sees it as something pleasurable. For him the goal of the playing in the pool is touching Shehan and not just a byproduct of the play. His wet dream is further evidence that his desire to touch Shehan is a sexual desire. Arjie's description of this dream, as with his description of his previous dream makes it seem like he is not fully aware of his homosexual desires. He notices he has his wet dreams after his dreams but does not connect his wet dreams to the content of his dreams. It is interesting to note that for Arjie expressions of homosexuality are first most fully realized in his dreams. His dreams are the place where he is the most safe, and he can express himself, even if only subconsciously, without fear of being labeled. In his dreams he is able to express desire for men in both his mind and his body, even though Arjie is not yet fully aware of the relationship between the two.

This isolation from labels is not perfect, and labels subtly influence Arjie's dreams. Neither Shehan nor Arjie speak Tamil. However, in describing his dream, Arjie says, "Every time I spoke to him he answered in Tamil, knowing that I did not understand" (237). This dream is ironic, in that Shehan as a Sinhalese boy can speak Tamil and Arjie the Tamil cannot. It again makes it clear that labeling Arjie as a Tamil is simplistic. Even if it is appropriate, the label denies the complexity of Arjie's identity, and there is no circumstance where it would be appropriate to use the label Tamil to condone violence. This dream is one of the many places in the novel where issues of sexuality and ethnicity are most strongly connected. However, with this dream, Selvadurai makes a distinction between sexual and ethnic labels. In the dream, ethnicity is a barrier to connection and gender is not.

The boys are separated by ethnicity as encapsulated by language. This dream foreshadows the end of the novel when Arjie and Shehan are ultimately separated by ethnicity despite Arjie being able to accept his homosexuality. This separation happens because Arjie and his family have to leave Sri Lanka and immigrate to Canada because they are Tamil because of the ethnic riots in Colombo, and Shehan gets to stay because he is Sinhalese. The riots make Arjie aware of the ethnic distinctions between the two of them. When Shehan visits Arjie during the riots while curfew is lifted for a few hours, Arjie realizes, "As I listened to him talk, something occurred to me that I had never really been conscious of before—Shehan was Sinhalese and I was not. This awareness did not change my feelings for him, it was simply there, like a thin translucent screen through which I watched him" (295). The violence of the riots makes Arjie more aware of ethnic

labels. This awareness begins to separate or alienate Arjie from Shehan. They no longer have the closeness they once had; there is now a barrier, as thin as it is, between the two.

This does not discount the progress Arjie makes in overcoming the alienating effects of ethnic Othering through mutual recognition. A barrier exists, but it is very small. Arjie is able to overcome ethnic labels that would separate him from the Sinhalese to the extent that he is able to have a romantic relationship with a Sinhalese. The only reason ethnic labels are harder to overcome than sexual labels is because ethnic labels are more explicit. Arjie and his family are consistently stereotyped negatively as “Tamils,” a term that is used to legitimize violence. For instance, during the riots in Colombo, the mobs are given electoral lists so they can target Tamil houses (283). Arjie and his family escape just before the mob sets fire to their house (289). The mob sets fire to Arjie’s grandmother and grandfather’s care while they are still in it because they are Tamil (300). This direct use of labels to legitimize violence does not occur with labels of sexuality. Arjie is never called a homosexual. In fact, the word homosexual does not appear in the entire novel. Instead, Arjie is called funny, pansy, faggot, sissy, effeminate, and people talk about his tendencies. Because the labels are more implicit, reprisals are not as immediate and violent. Individuals like Arjie and Shehan can also ignore and misunderstand, consciously or not, these subtle labels.

Even though overcoming implicit sexual labels is easier than overcoming ethnic labels, Arjie still has difficulties fully rejecting taboos against homosexuality. Physical connections at least partially free him from the influence of labels to the point that he has sex with Shehan, but just the presence of his family reminds him about implicit taboo on homosexuality. Right after he has sex with Shehan, in his family’s garage, they eat lunch

with Arjie's family, and Arjie becomes disgusted with himself. His disgust mostly comes from the reminder his family provides of the indoctrination he received from them that homosexuality is unspeakably horrible, something that cannot be directly spoken about only labeled as funny. They do not say anything to him, but just looking at them reminds him of his family's fear, expressed in code, that he would become homosexual. He thinks of how hurt his mother and father would be if they knew what he had just done. He looks at his mother "and imagined what her reaction would have been had she discovered us, the profound expression of hurt that would have come over her face" (256). He becomes, as he says, "torn between my desire for Shehan and disgust at that desire" (260). That night he lies in bed thinking about Shehan kissing and touching him and realizes he is still physically attracted to Shehan: "Then, to my horror, I felt the stirring of desire within me. I looked away from the ceiling, reminding myself about the loathing I had felt, the way my backside had hurt as he pushed me against the wall. But these memories only served to increase my desire (260). Arjie feels disgust when around his family, but when he is alone his desire returns and is stronger than his family-induced loathing.

Arjie struggles between the discourse he has been taught about the horrors of homosexuality and the understanding he gains through moments of reciprocal recognition he experiences with Shehan:

Right and wrong, fair and unfair had nothing to do with how things really were. I thought of Shehan and myself. What had happened between us in the garage was not wrong. For how could loving Shehan be bad? Yet if my parents or anybody else discovered this love, I would be in terrible trouble. I thought of how unfair this was and I was reminded of things I had seen happen to other people, like Jegan, or even Radha Aunty, who, in their own way, had experienced injustice. (267)

Through observing their body language, he experiences moments of mutual recognition with individuals, such as Jegan and Radha, who have experienced injustice because ethnic labels, and Arjie is able to recognize this injustice. Even though his relationships with these individuals do not last, when he experiences the alienating effects of labels, he is able to refer back to these moments of mutual recognition and the understanding and healing gained during these moments. Looking back helps lessen the alienation he feels in the present, and he is able to resist the Othering effects of labels. Therefore, as he is struggling with his guilt over his homosexuality, he is able to ultimately accept his homosexuality and his relationship with Shehan by reflecting on past moments of reciprocal recognition.

One thing Arjie recognizes through moments of mutual recognition and by reflecting on these moments is that injustice occurs as people are forced to accept labels. Radha eventually accepts ethnic stereotypes about Sinhalese because of her experience being assaulted on the train and marries a Tamil man she doesn't love over the Sinhalese man she does. Arjie's dad fires Jegan because Jegan fights against racial stereotypes instead of ignoring them. This realization of the injustice of stereotypes gives Arjie the strength to resist and reinterpret these labels. An interracial, homosexual relationship with Shehan becomes desirable instead of disgusting. At the prize-giving when Arjie purposely mangles the poems, he rejects the attempts of his family, school, and ethnicity to label him and affirms his love for Shehan. This is after the two have had sex and Arjie has worked through his guilt over his homosexuality. He sees mangling the poems as a way to express to Shehan that he accepts him as a lover.

Arjie, unlike Ondaatje's characters, does not form a community with two or other individuals based on touch that give him the agency to explore issues of identity. Instead, Arjie forms relationships with individuals and these individuals provide him with strategies for questioning the oppressive discourses of the communities he is a part of. In fact, for Arjie communities such as families and school enslave rather than heal. Selvadurai uses them, especially the family, as a microcosm of Sri Lankan society and a stand-in for oppressive postcolonial governments and neocolonialist influences (Kumarage 25). These institutions, as has been shown, use naming to control and to promote a nationalism based on heteronormative masculinity and ethnic segregation, which is then replicated in Arjie's family. The communities of *Funny Boy* are not the small knit communities of Ondaatje, but larger communities with unequal power distribution. Arjie does not have small communities to help him deal with oppression, so he finds relief in individuals.

Only through physical touch and love are Arjie and Shehan able to overcome divisive ethnic and anti-homosexual categorizing. The moments of mutual recognition that occur between Arjie and Shehan, allows the two to feel empowered to accept that there can be an in-between space between Sinhalese and Tamil. Through their sexuality, which also escapes easy definition, Arjie and Shehan provide a model for seeing beyond the biological categorizing of ethnic identities. In this sense, they escape a colonial discourse that had once labeled Tamils as Other and learn to see each other as the same.

Part 3 Salman Rushdie

Chapter 4 Rushdie's Two Levels of Allegory in *Shalimar the Clown*

As with Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and *The English Patient* and Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, in both *Shalimar the Clown* and *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has many of his characters objectify other characters, denying the multifaceted nature of the characters identities and in turn leading to their sense of alienation. While Rushdie is concerned about exploring the effects of naming on individuals, he differs from Ondaatje and Shalimar in that the type of naming he focuses on is allegorical. Rushdie is a writer who is known for, among many things, his use of allegory and his focus on polyvocal communities. In fact, according to Tom Wilhelmus, one of Rushdie's most treasured beliefs expressed in his literature is that "ethnically diverse societies can create a legacy of tolerance and civilization" (346). In both *Shalimar the Clown* and *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie uses allegory to express the importance of tolerance and polyvocality. His allegories construct the nation as a polyvocal entity and illustrate what is lost when polyvocality is lost in nations. He creates characters who represent nation, then uses the objectification of characters by other characters to symbolize how the diversity of nations is denied.

Rushdie uses allegory about polyvocality to combat the Manichean allegory present in many colonialist novels. JanMohamed argues that Manichean allegory is the colonialist's main trope. By Manichean, Jan Mohamed means an opposition in which Europeans are constructed as superior to indigenous populations (61). This is done

symbolically in Manichean allegory by setting up “a field of diverse yet inter-changeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object” in which the side of the opposition applied to Europeans is always construed as the more favorable (63). Part of the purpose of Manichean allegory is to objectify indigenous individuals in order to legitimize the colonial project. As JanMohamed says, “The European writer commodifies the native by negating his individuality, his subjectivity, so that he is now perceived as a generic being that can be exchanged for any other native (they all look alike, act alike, and so on)” (64). Manichean allegory negates subjectivity as one native can represent all natives.

Furthermore, just as Manichean allegory negates individual differences, it also negates cultural differences as writers “transform social and historical dissimilarities into universal, metaphysical differences” (68). JanMohamed feels that Manichean allegory is so prevalent in colonial fiction that “even the works of some of the most enlightened and critical colonial writers eventually succumb to a narrative organization based on racial/metaphysical oppositions, whose motives remain morally fixed but whose categories flex to accommodate any situation” (61). Because of this flexibility, many writers, sometimes even unintentionally, use the colonist Manichean allegory in neocolonial contexts. Rushdie, on the other hand, illustrates that not all allegory is Manichean. He is able to create polyvalent allegories that critique the discourse of Manichean allegories. He recovers the subjectivity of indigenous individuals and their disparate social and historical backgrounds in his fiction. At the same time, he uses

allegory to show that Manichean objectification is vicious and detrimental. He depicts polyvocality as something to be celebrated and not erased.

However, this polyvocal allegory is only the first level of allegory in these two novels. Rushdie also includes a second level of allegory in which he has his characters function as authors in that they allegorize each other. Characters allegorize themselves and others to make themselves and their perspectives powerful and to discount the power and perspectives of others. This second level of allegory prevents moments of recognition from occurring. It becomes impossible for characters to recognize the desires and subjectivity of other characters as they are using allegory to achieve their own desires and to objectify and discount the desires of others. Rushdie adds a complexity to *Shalimar the Clown* and *Midnight's Children* by creating a tension between the polyvocal narrative that he sets up and the objectifying allegorizing, which prevents reciprocal recognition, of his characters. This tension leads to a greater condemnation of Manichean allegory. He not only condemns Manichean allegory through his use of polyvocal allegory he also condemns it by having his characters become Manichean allegorists themselves and showing the harm that comes to others and themselves as they use Manichean allegory.

Unfortunately, other critics do not recognize these complexities in Rushdie's use of allegory in *Shalimar the Clown*, and many feel that Rushdie fails in his attempts to construct an allegory in this novel. For instance, Neil Murphy feels *Shalimar the Clown* is an allegory about how Kashmir has become corrupt through American neocolonialism. However, he feels this allegory fails because Rushdie blurs the allegorical and literal levels (343-344). Rushdie seems to switch between treating characters as allegorical

representations and as individuals, and it is hard to see when the characters are acting as allegory, when they are acting as literal individuals, and the connections between the two levels. Murphy, and other critics such as Annabella Pitkin and Tom Wihelmus, feels this failure of the allegory is due to poor writing and that Rushdie allows his political motivations to dilute his artistic endeavors.

I disagree that Rushdie fails in his attempts to construct an allegory. Even if his allegory in *Shalimar the Clown* is faulty, this does not mean that *Shalimar the Clown* fails as a novel. Many people who read and enjoy *Shalimar the Clown* do not have a sophisticated enough background in Kashmiri culture and history in order to understand the novel's allegorical significance. Thus, they can still enjoy other aspects of the novel, such as its humor, even if the allegory, which they do not understand anyway, fails to reach them. This does not mean that the allegory itself has failed. Rushdie is not blurring the allegorical with the literal; he is using allegory at two levels, and these two levels of allegory are in tension with each other. This tension, however, can be interpreted as a contradiction in the text, which critics have done, only because they are not aware of these two levels of allegory.

Shalimar the Clown begins with India Ophus witnessing the murder of her father Maximillian Ophuls, former U.S. Ambassador to India. The book then flashes back to provide India's family history. It depicts Max's actions as a member of the French resistance during WWII. It also depicts Boonyi, India's mother, in Pachigam, a Kashmiri village. Boonyi marries a fellow villager, Shalimar the Clown. After they are married, Boonyi has an affair with Max, loses her beauty and becomes obese, and has a child by him which she names Kashmira. However, Maximillian's wife, Peggy, claims the child

and renames her India. Boonyi returns to Pachigam, but her father and father-in-law declare her dead in order to stop Shalimar from killing her in retaliation for her affair. Shalimar then leaves the valley to join an Islamic terrorist organization. When his father and father-in-law die, he kills Boonyi and then Maximilian. After her father's murder, India investigates her history and learns about her mother and adopts her mother's name for her, Kashmiri. India, now Kashmiri, testifies against Shalimar the Clown which leads to his incarceration. Shalimar eventually escapes from prison. The book ends with Shalimar breaking into India's home to kill her while India prepares to defend herself.

Rushdie uses allegory to establish Kashmir as initially a polyvocal region and to argue that this polyvocality was destroyed and suppressed through the objectifying practices of outside influences. For instance, Boonyi is a Hindu and Shalimar is Islam, yet both represent Kashmir. Boonyi is named after the Kashmiri Chinar tree. Shalimar is also a reference to Kashmir, specifically the Shalimar Garden's in Kashmir. At the beginning of the novel, Rushdie uses these characters to represent Kashmir as a polyvocal community where individuals from different ethnic and religious backgrounds live together harmoniously. They engage in a sexual relationship they keep hidden from the other villagers in Pachigam. When knowledge of the relationship becomes public, the other villagers, despite censuring the couple for engaging in premarital sex, embrace this bi-religious couple. It is through their fathers' words to the couple that Rushdie makes it clear that he is constructing their relationship as an allegorical representation of polyvocal Kashmir:

“We are all brothers and Sisters here,’ said Abdullah. “There is no Hindu-Muslim issue. Two Kashmiri—two Pachigami—youngsters wish to marry, that’s all. A love match is acceptable to both families and so a marriage

there will be; both Hindu and Muslim customs will be observed.” Pyarelal added when his turn came, “To defend their love is to defend what is finest in ourselves.” (110)

Boonyi and Shalimar’s marriage represents what Rushdie through Pyarelal sees as the finest quality of Kashmir—it is a region whose people embrace diversity.

Even though Rushdie at the beginning has the couple’s marriage be an allegory for a peaceful Kashmir, he insinuates, even with their births, that they will represent the violence that will divide Kashmir. Both are born at the moment of Indian partition (354). It seems like Rushdie is making Boonyi and Shalimar allegories for post partition Kashmir through the symbolism of their births similarly to how in *Midnight’s Children* Saleem is born at the moment of Indian partition and becomes a symbol of post-independence India. Being associated with partition, they become associated with the violence that happen in Kashmir after partition as both India and Pakistan fought and continued to fight over Kashmir. This violence is allegorized through the break-up of Boonyi and Shalimar’s relationship. Rushdie uses the disintegration of their marriage as an allegory for how Kashmir’s harmonious polyvocality has been destroyed by outside influences.

One of the destructive outside influences is American foreign policy in South Asia. This destruction is allegorized through Boonyi’s affair with Max, the American Ambassador to India. The effects of American foreign policy is allegorized with Max representing the United States, Boonyi representing Kashmir, and their affair and the affairs disastrous results symbolizes the corrupting influence American policy has had on Kashmir. According to Murphy:

Max becomes one of the major allegorical anchors, representative as he is of U.S. imperialism, Western theft and destruction, racial dominance, and essentially an extension of the neocolonial pattern that has had such an impact on India, Pakistan, and (of course) Kashmir. (354)

Max becomes an allegory of U.S. imperialism mostly through his affair with Boonyi. He steals Boonyi away from Shalimar. He also constructs Boonyi as a sexual object whom he can consume and dominate to fulfill his own desires. His treatment of Boonyi mirrors the United States relationship with Kashmir. American policy in Kashmir is seen as driven by American interests in the region and not from a desire to help and understand the Kashmiri people. Boonyi is the one who seduced Max and instigates the affair. She does it to achieve fame and material prosperity. She allegorically represents the idea that Kashmir instigated its own corruption by seeking out American intervention. Just as Boonyi seeks help, in the form of Max, to make her life better, Kashmir sought out American intervention to help stabilize the situation in Kashmir. However, this request for American intervention did not lead to the United States providing assistance. Instead it provides the United States to influence and exploit Kashmir for its own purposes. The negative effect of American influence on Kashmir is symbolized through the negative affect the affair has on Boonyi. The affair makes Boonyi unhappy, and she becomes addicted to drugs and exotic foods. Her addictions and depression lead to the loss of Boonyi's beauty. Just as Max has a corrupting affect on Boonyi beauty, America has a corrupting effect on Kashmir.

Rushdie also illustrates through allegory how U.S. policies increased Islamic terrorism in Kashmir. Shalimar becomes an allegorical representation of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism and the transformation of Kashmir from a peaceful to a violent place through the influence of American policy. Shalimar joins an Islamic terrorist group

after he learns of Boonyi and Max's affair in order to learn how to kill, so he can eventually exact his revenge on them by killing them. His feeling of betrayal over Boonyi and Max's affair, which represents the corruption of Kashmir through U.S. influence, represents the anger many feel about America's foreign policies in Kashmir and throughout the world. Some Muslims become so angry at the United States that they join Islamic terrorist groups in an effort to combat U.S. policies and actions.

Even though Rushdie understands some of the motivations behind Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, he sees it as a destructive influence that also eradicates polyvocality in Kashmir. Rushdie shows through Shalimar how Islamic fundamentalism decreases polyvocality. At the training camp for a terrorist group, Shalimar is required to completely give himself up to militant Islamic fundamentalism: "For Shalimar the clown the total abnegation of the self was a more problematic requirement, a sticking place" (267). Even though he inwardly resists, outwardly he is required to function only as an Islamic fundamentalist. In acting this part, he tells the leader of the camp, Bulbul Fakh, "I cleanse myself of everything except the struggle" (268). Patricia Fernandez-Kelly in exploring Rushdie's depiction of terrorism in *Shalimar the Clown* says, "Implicit in his novel is a condemnation of military intrusions that threaten to obliterate local differences and unify Muslims throughout the world in opposition to Western arrogance" (473). But Rushdie shows that militaristic Islamic fundamentalist movements attempt to destroy polyvocality even in Islamic communities, by forcing Muslims to adapt a universal Muslim identity to combat what is seen as a unified Western arrogance.

The affect of Islamic fundamentalism on Kashmir is also allegorized through the iron Mullah, Bulbul Fakh. He is actually made out of metal and as an Iron Mullah was

one of the men “who were miraculously born from these rusting war metals, who went out into the valley to preach resistance and revenge” (115). By making Bulbul Fakh a man constructed out of war metals, Rushdie shows how Islamic fundamentalism often is a moment that perpetuates violence and spreads through this violence. Also, he shows that many Muslim fundamentalists were supplied with American weapons. Just as Fakh is made from the metal of previous wars, Muslim fundamentalists are supplied with American weapons used to fight previous wars or meant to be used against America’s enemies. Fakh, as a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism, has the power to bring the hatred of the Indian Pakistani conflict to the peaceful village of Shirmal. Shirmal is close to Pachigam, and while unlike Pachigam its villagers are mostly Muslims, they peacefully interact with Hindus. However, Bulbul Fakh gets many of the villagers to listen to his extremist anti-Hindu views and gets them to hate the more accepting village of Pachigam. Bulbul Fakh is expelled from the village by the leader of Shirmal, and he the leader of the terrorist group Shalimar joins. His appearance is even more impressive that it was before:

He was taller than Shalimar the clown remembered, a giant over six feet tall, and also leaner and much more beautiful than in the old days in Shirmal. Was it possible that he had grown bigger and more attractive with the passing years? As for his being made of iron, there would no longer be any argument about that. There were places on his shins and shoulders where the knocks of a hard life had rubbed away the covering of skin and the dull metal beneath had become visible, battle hardened, indestructible. These proofs of his miraculous nature gave Bulbul Fakh great authority. (264) (fix format)

The changes in Bulbul Fakh symbolize the increased presence of Islamic fundamentalism in Kashmir. Just as Bulbul Fakh has become larger, the influence and presence of Islamic fundamentalism in Kashmir has become greater. The violence of Islamic

fundamentalism, represented by the fact that Bulbul Fakh is made of iron, is more obvious. Like Bulbul Fakh, Islamic fundamentalism has become indestructible, something that cannot be removed from Kashmir.

The destruction of polyvocality in Kashmir because of the increasingly solidified Muslim/Hindu divisions is allegorized through the destruction of Pachigam, a symbol of Kashmiri polyvocality. Shalimar, his brother Anees, and a few other young men from Pachigam become Islamic terrorists and participate in terrorist activities in Kashmir. In retaliation, the Hindu Colonel Hammir Kachhwaha of the Indian army attacks Pachigam and kills every person living in the village. As Pachigam is destroyed by religious violence, so is what Pyarelal called “the finest in ourselves,” which is Kashmir’s polyvocality and acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity (110).

India’s name is the most obviously example of a character being an allegorical representative for a country in that she is actually the country. Rushdie makes India an allegory for the rootless condition caused by globalism. India was born in India to a Jewish father who immigrates to the United States from France and a Kashmiri mother. She was raised first in Great Britain and then in the United States. Rushdie is using India’s loose connection to India to comment on the status of India, and in extension the status of most nations, in the contemporary moment. Rushdie is showing how conceptions of nation and national identity are becoming more and more complicated and troubled in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized. Rushdie uses India to allegorize this condition. At the beginning of the novel, India, despite her name, has never even been to India. She, like Anil, purposely constructs herself as the stereotypical Western individual. She is disciplined, rational, reserved, irreligious, and purposely

speaks with an English accent (6). She feels no connection to India and thus despises her name: “‘India’ still felt wrong to her, it felt exoticist, colonial, suggesting the appropriation of a reality that was not hers to own, and she insisted to herself that it didn’t fit her anyway, she didn’t feel like an India” (5). The nationalist identity of India does not fit India’s diasporic identity. She is Americanized despite her name. Through *India Opahul*, Rushdie is questioning how secure the concept of Indian national identity is in the midst of a global context. How are foreign commodities and cultural imports influencing Indian culture? Is cultural diversity and polyvocality decreased throughout the world due to the obliquity of globalized cultural products? How is the India diaspora complicating Indian national identity?

Rushdie further allegorizes the rootlessness caused by globalization by having India rename herself Kashmira. India is uncomfortable with her lack of roots, and she attempts to connect herself to her South Asian past. She does this mainly by searching for her Kashmiri mother. She goes to Kashmir and learns about her mother and her mother’s death. India then makes the name change after she learns that her birth mother named her Kashmira. Rushdie uses the name change not to allegorize the actuality of connecting to a cultural heritage, but the difficulty of making such a connection and the strong desire to become reconnected despite the difficulty. When India visits India, she decides, “She would not be India in India. She would be her mother’s child. As Kashmira, then, Kashmira in a baseball cap and jeans, she walked into the Press Club in Delhi and with American daring asked the old India hands for guidance and help” (356). While India sees the name change as signifying a reconnection to her Kashmiri roots and mother, Rushdie complicates this interpretation with the image of her as an American in

“baseball cap and jeans.” Despite India’s strong desire for roots, Rushdie questions whether any connection has taken place. India is still culturally American after she changes her name. She has what Rushdie calls “American daring.” Despite the name change and her short visits to Kashmir, she still has not connected to Kashmir. While she renames herself Kashmiri as a symbolic gesture to claim independence for Kashmir, she is still India. She is still basically the same character after the renaming, still lives in Los Angeles, and still is culturally American. India’s desire to establish roots with a cultural heritage is denied to her because of her diasporic upbringing in a global world. Rushdie uses her experiences to allegorize the diasporic rootlessness and the difficulty in establishing roots.

India changing her name to Kashmira, along with being used by Rushdie to allegorize contemporary rootlessness, also functions at the second level of allegory. In the second level the characters act like authors by using allegory. As they implement allegory they objectify themselves and others. The name change is an attempt by India to read herself allegorically, to connect herself to something larger. To India, “the terms Kashmir and paradise were synonymous” (4). In calling herself Kashmira, she is objectifying her life as paradisiacal and is discounting her pain and trials and what they contribute to her identity. By renaming herself Kashmira, India symbolically connects herself to a lost, idealized Kashmir and Kashmiri mother whom she knows little about. Her allegorization of herself as Kashmir also causes her to objectify Kashmir. She does not see the diversity of the region and sees it as just a static paradise. Even after she goes to Kashmir and sees the aftermath of the violence there, she still views it as a mythical and exotic place and tries to claim some of its magic by naming herself

Kashmira. In naming Kashmir a paradise, she is ignoring the violence occurring in that region. She is trying to speak for Kashmir, explaining what it means without having tangible knowledge or experience.

While Rushdie uses the names Boonyi and Shalimar as symbols of Kashmir, he also makes it clear that they give themselves these names, representing the second level of allegory. Shalimar, whose actual name is Noman Sher Noman, renames himself after something beautiful, the Shalimar garden. This name has further symbolic import to Shalimar. He renames himself Shalimar because “he wanted to set Noman the child aside and be his new adult self” (46). His name signifies that he has become something more important, at least to him—an adult. Shalimar also feels the name connects him to a concept greater than himself which is enduring love. The name Shalimar is a symbol for Shalimar’s love for Boonyi since he chose it because Boonyi was born in the Shalimar garden. Because his identity has become flattened and solely centered on his love for Boonyi, he is devastated and loses all sense of identity after she is gone. He is reduced to centering his life on getting revenge for Boonyi’s betrayal because he as objectified himself as Boonyi’s lover. Because of Boonyi’s affair with Max, he has now lost the one thing that gave his life meaning.

Boonyi also gives herself an idealized name. Boonyi is originally named Bhoomi. However, she hates the name because she says her name “is mud and dirt and stone and I don’t want it” (46). She perceives her name as symbolizing her as messy, ugly and worthless. She instead insists that people call her Boonyi because “This was the local word for the celestial Kashmiri Chinar tree” (46). Boonyi attempts to make herself beautiful and majestic by naming herself after a tree that has these qualities. In fact,

Murphy points out that Bhoomi renames herself Boonyi for “its implications of grandeur and aspiration” (Murphy 357). One of Boonyi’s greatest desires is to achieve the grandeur her name suggests by moving out of Pachigam and becoming a famous dancer. This allegorization of herself excuses her of the unethical actions she uses to reach her goals. Her name signifies that she is fated to have a majestic existence, which justifies using any means necessary to achieve this fated goal.

Some of Rushdie’s characters who are not significant in constructing the first level of allegory are important in developing the second level. As with her biological mother, India’s adopted mother, Peggy Rhode Ophuls, uses the same strategy of renaming to improve her status. When she arrives in India after Max is appointed as the American ambassador to India, she becomes dedicated to improving conditions in Indian orphanages. She becomes known as Peggy-Mata, mother of the motherless, and is even compared to Mother Teresa. She does not give herself the name Peggy-Mata; instead, she is first called Peggy-Mata by the Indian press, and it becomes a popular nickname for her (186). However, Peggy does embrace this nickname: “Transformed into her new persona of Peggy-Mata, mother of the motherless, she had embarked on a nonstop nationwide tour of Indian orphanages” (186). Just as India and other characters attempt to improve their lives through renaming themselves, Peggy uses the name she is given by others to try to improve her situation. She uses this name which allegorizes her as a mother to create for herself a new persona. She adopts this name and persona in an attempt for her to escape her life as a barren American woman in a crumbling marriage and become a mother of thousands (186). Peggy tries to separate herself from her undesirable situation. However, the life signified by the name Peggy-Mata is an illusion.

Her marriage dissolves, she has to leave India when Max is disgraced, and the one child she claims out of the experience is not hers. The child, India, is the product of Max's affair with Boonyi, and her physical similarity to Max and Boonyi constantly reminds her of the affair. Despite embracing the nickname Peggy-Mata which allegorizes her as a mother, she is a horrible mother. She treats India poorly, and India grows to despise her (345). Accepting a name that allegorizes her as a mother does not make her a mother. It just causes Peggy to become alienated from herself because she denies her actual reality and claims a reality that can never actually exist for her.

Colonel Hammir Kachhwaha, a soldier in the Indian army stationed in Kashmir, also fails in his attempts to connect himself to something larger through a nickname. He wants to be known as Hammer, because he sees it as "an English play on Hammir. A good, soldierly name" (94). He wants to connect himself to England, a place he views as being superior to India. He is indoctrinated into colonial discourse, which privileges England over India, and hence, he wants to remake himself as an English soldier. However, everyone in Kashmir calls him Colonel Turtle because his surname Kachhwaha is similar to Kachwa, which means "turtle" in Hindi. Colonel Kachhwaha hates this nickname because he feels it highlights his Indianness, since it is based on a Hindi word and not an English one. He also feels that many of the Kashmiri use it to belittle him. However, he does not realize that they are mocking not his Hindi identity, or his last name, but his attempts to adopt English mannerisms. This attempt at the nickname Hammir alienates Colonel Kachhwaha from himself because through it he is denying his cultural identity and embracing a cultural identity he knows little about and which does not fit.

Shalimar's mother also attempts to change her life by changing her heritage. In her case, she does not change her name, Firdaus, or gives herself a nickname but changes her ancestors, maintaining that she is descended from Alexander the Great. She does this to make herself seem grander, but the villagers realize this claim is false and the narrator even calls it "the Alexandrian fantasy of Firdaus Noman" (73). Along with making up her "Alexandrian fantasy" to make herself seem grander, she does it to hide her real family history. Her grandfather was an Indian bandit who made his fortune by theft. She is attempting to claim a Western heritage and deny her spurious Indian heritage. She is alienating herself from her heritage and from those in her community because she claims she has a more lustrous ancestry than they. However, everyone in the village of Pachigam knows Firdaus' real family history, and thus her attempts to obscure it through naming herself as Alexandrian are ridiculous and ineffectual (74-75).

Max, unlike the other characters, is forced to rename himself because he is a Jew working for the French Resistance during World War II. However, like other characters, he chooses aliases that he feels ally him to something grander. Some of the aliases Max uses are Sebastian Brant, Niccolò, Jacques Wimpfeling, and Sturmbahnführer (165). These are all names of famous medieval humanists. For instance, his first alias is the French humanist Sebastian Brant who lived in the late 1400s and early 1500s. Other members of the resistance criticize Max for choosing such a well-known name. Max ignores this criticism and continues to use the names of famous medieval humanists throughout the war. He attempts to bestow himself with their intellect and fame by using their names. However, most people see Max's choices as not wise but as foolish. Also, he puts his life at risk by using such prominent names.

Characters do not only allegorize themselves; they also allegorize others. For instance, India consciously distances and alienates herself from her friends after her father by dies by viewing them as allegorical representations of their occupations instead of as individuals. In thinking about her closest friends, she names them, to herself, the film producer, the personal trainer, her friend who managed a band, her geek friend with a dot-com fortune who was losing it, etc. (336-7). India refuses to remember the actual given names of her friends and instead names them by their occupations. In this way, she is able to forget the close intimate relationships she actually had with these friends. In fact she even thinks, “Her closest intimates didn’t feel real to her anymore” (336). She makes them unreal by perceiving them as allegorical objects instead of named individuals.

The leaders of Pachigam allegorize Boonyi as dead after her affair with Max. They officially declare her as dead and even fill out the official forms to declare her dead and mourn her death for forty days (223). Boonyi is of course only symbolically dead. But the label of being dead still alienates her from the other villagers after she returns to Pachigam. The villagers refuse to interact directly with her and treat her as if she is not there or as if she is a ghost. She lives in isolation away from the village. Even though the villagers will not talk to her or verbally acknowledge her existence, they leave food outside of her door (228). They even leave two goats outside her hut so she can have milk and make cheese (241). This is the ultimate example of naming leading to alienation. Because she is labeled as dead, the villagers treat her as such and thus do not interact with her. However, this is also, ironically, probably the most sympathetic example of naming in the novel. Boonyi’s father and Shalimar’s father label her as dead

so that Shalimar will not kill her. If she is labeled as dead, they reason, Shalimar would have no reason to physically kill her (237). Despite, their noble intent, naming Boonyi as dead leads to alienation and their actions only forestall Shalimar and do not completely stop him. Shalimar eventually kills Boonyi despite her being named as dead.

The attempts of these characters to rename themselves and others reveal them to be fetishists. In talking about the fetish, Anne McClintock says, “Far from being merely phallic substitutes, fetishes can be seen as the displacement onto an object (or person) of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level” (184). These characters do not like their current circumstances so they tried to resolve their frustrations by renaming themselves or others, and thus simplifying their circumstances. For instance, Peggy accepts being called Peggy-Mata because it helps resolve the contradiction between desperately wanting to be a mother and not having any children. The name becomes a fetish for her. However, the name does not make her a good mother and does not give her biological children. McCintock goes on to say, “By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities. For this reason the fetish can be called an impassioned object” (184). McClintock implies that to turn something into a fetish, it must be turned into an object; therefore, the characters objectify themselves and others. They want to allegorically be connected to places or ideas larger than themselves in ways that symbolically resolves the contradictions and lack in their lives.

Boonyi is a clear example of someone who uses allegorical names as fetish objects. The longer Boonyi is Max’s mistress, the more she misses her husband and the more she resents Max. She has a contradiction between hating being Max’s mistress and

feeling that she cannot end the relationship. She deals with this contradiction by creating the fetish of “Kashmir.” She starts to talk to Max about Kashmir, but to Boonyi, Kashmir means her husband Shalimar and Indian armed forces means Max. She talks positively about Kashmir and negatively about the Indian armed forces. She finds power in this fetish because it allows her to express her hatred of Max to him without repercussions. Max is oblivious to the allegorical meaning of Boonyi’s descriptions of the situation in Kashmir and “He allowed her diatribes on the ‘occupation of Kashmir’ to affect his thinking, never suspecting that she was secretly railing against himself and against the ineffectual husband who had failed to come to her rescue” (197). As Max remains ignorant of Boonyi’s allegory, she is emboldened to become more direct. She begins to refer to Kashmir as “he” and to refer to the Indian Armed Forces “you.” She even tells Max, “How can you not comprehend the humiliation of it, the shame of having your boots march all over my private fields?” (197). As Boonyi transforms Max into an allegorical figure, she is able to distance herself from him and the affair even as she continues to have sex with him.

In *Shalimar the Clown*, the characters’ impulse to allegorize leads to alienation. Some of the characters are alienated because they deny their own identities and choose allegorical labels instead. This attempt at self-allegory leads to and maintains alienation because it prevents the recognition of the suffering of others, since characters allegorize themselves because they want to be superior to their surroundings, which often include other people. They are so concerned with their own desires and difficulties that they cannot see others as equals. Also, as the characters objectify others through allegory, they cannot view others as subjects with agency. For example, Boonyi, because she sees

herself as majestic, does not consider the feelings of others but focuses on her own aspirations. As she realizes she will never achieve her goal to become a famous dancer, she exchanges one set of desires and appetites for another. She exchanges her appetites for sex, for which the narrator says she had a “bottomless enthusiasm,” and fame for an appetite for food. She becomes addicted to chewing tobacco, opium, medicine, and eating. This obsession with eating is seen as a continuation of her focus on personal pleasure: “She took to gluttony with the same bottomless enthusiasm she had once had for sex, diverting the immense force of her erotic requirements from her bed to her table” (201). Her appetite for food is connected to her desire to connect herself to or become something bigger than she was in Pachigam. She feels that “if her world would not expand her body could” (201). As she indulges in her physical appetites, “inevitably her beauty dimmed. Her hair lost its luster, her skin coarsened, her teeth rotted, her odor soured, and her bulk—ah! Her bulk—increased steadily” (203). She goes from being beautiful to become fat, ugly creature. Her appetite becomes so immense that it crosses ethnic and religious boundaries. She eats Kashmiri, Tandoor, Mughlai and Bengali food. She is described as a “vegetarian and nonvegetarian, fish- and meat-eating, Hindu, Christian and Muslim, a democratic, secularist omnivore” (202). Even her appetite for food has become allegorized. However, her pan-ethnic appetite does not symbolize harmony. She consumes these various dishes to satisfy her own hunger. Transforming her desires from fame to food does not make her situation better. Both lead to alienation and loss.

Boonyi’s attempts to achieve fame lead to destruction, which is most visible in her affair with Max. As with the relationship between Almásy and Katharine, Boonyi

and Max's affair is devoid of moments of mutual recognition. It is selfish and pragmatic. Boonyi has an affair with Max only because of the fame and wealth she thinks it will bring her. Before she sleeps with Max, Boonyi initiates a thorough negotiation with him where it is made clear what each party will gain from the affair: "For an hour thy hammered out the treaty of their affiliation as if it were a back-channel negotiation or an international arms deal" (192). The characters allegorize the affair as an international treaty, making it seem so momentous that it can only be compared to negotiations between two nations. However, by allegorizing the affair, it becomes harder for the affair to lead to meaningful connection. Boonyi and Max objectify themselves into nations and view each other as objects and not individuals. This allegorical comparison also reinforces that this affair is about enhancing the personal life of the two individuals involved and not connection. The lack of connection is highlighted through the use of "affiliation" and not a word denoting a stronger connection. The reader is led to believe that this relationship will end badly in that it is compared to an international arms deal—the exchange of tools of violence.

Throughout the relationship, both Max and Boonyi are unhappy because they each focus on their own desires, and ironically, those desires are not fulfilled. Max initially wants Boonyi purely because she is beautiful, and he thinks that having a relationship with such a beautiful woman will improve his image. Later on he feels that he loves her and wants her to love him so he can be happy. Ultimately, the relationship makes Max unhappy, leading to a scandal that ends his career as an ambassador and to the breakup of his marriage. His unhappiness is compounded as Boonyi cannot give him the love he demands of her. She cannot do this because she continues to see the

relationship as an exchange. She is exchanging her body for wealth and dancing lessons (194). However, she is only an adequate dancer and even lessons from a master cannot transform her into a superb one. While she does live a life of luxury as Max's mistress, when the affair is over and she returns to Pachigam, she lives a life of isolation and poverty and is eventually driven mad by her experiences. Boonyi and Max's affair is a relationship focused around fame and image, rather than the needs of the other, so it only leads to further loss and alienation for both characters.

India's sexual relations also do not lead to moments of mutual recognition. At the beginning of the novel, India is engaged. She does not love her fiancé and is only marrying him because everyone expects it. She easily breaks off the engagement when her father dies. When India first visits Kashmir, she meets Yuvraj, a young Kashmiri man who falls madly in love with her and declares his love. She is perplexed by this declaration: "What was she supposed to do with his declaration, she asked him, it was too heavy, took up too much room, it was baggage she couldn't carry with her on the flight" (370). Even though his love is a burden, India does desire Yuvraj: "She could feel the fingers of his longing stretching toward her, and she understood again that she desired him also, she wondered what his hands would feel like on her body" (365). But India is as reserved around him as she is around everyone else and does not share her feelings with him. In fact, she often discounts and ridicules, in her mind, his words and actions. She finds him stiff and monosyllabic. She thinks he is a coward, mediocre and second rate (369). She even calls his love useless (370). She initially rejects his love because she cannot see what it can do for her.

Despite the lack of meaningful connection, India and Yuvraj eventually enter into a relationship, even though India lives in Los Angeles, Yuvraj lives in Kashmir, and they only occasionally see each other. India realizes that something is missing in their relationship and that she would have to reveal more of herself to Yuvraj for the relationship to work. At one point, India thinks “to love was to risk your life” (168). To truly love, an individual has to risk sharing his or her innermost thoughts and feelings with another person, whether these thoughts and feelings are communicated through touch, body language, or speech, to hope the individual’s pain and needs are recognized by the other person, and to recognize the other person’s concerns as well. It is a risk because the other individual may not recognize the individual as a subject but views him or her as an object. Even though India enters into a relationship with Yuvraj, she is not willing to take the risk, initially, though she at least realizes what must be done.

Many of the characters long for interpersonal connections. In addition to romantic relationships, they attempt to achieve connection by forming other types of interpersonal relationships. However, all attempts at connection fail because of the lack of recognition. Max is a character who particularly longs for connection. Max not only longs for connection, he feels it will be easy to achieve. Max feels he can connect with the Indian people through a shared experience with violence. When he is appointed as the American Ambassador to India, he thinks he can understand India because it is a place of violent upheavals, and he had experienced the violence of World War II (138). Max in his first public address in India, references this ‘connection’ saying, “We [referencing himself as a Jew] have suffered our share of slaughter and bloodletting as well. Our great leaders, and our mothers and children, too, have been taken from us”

(138). He concludes his speech with “each tragedy belongs to itself and at the same time to everyone else. What diminishes any of us diminishes us all” (138). According to Max, violence can be allegorized and experiences with violence connect all people together. However, instead of using this “connection” to recognize the people in his audience as subjects, he uses it to speak for India about the situation in Kashmir of which he knows little. As he does, it becomes apparent that Max does not understand India, and he eventually has to resign as an ambassador in disgrace after his affair with Boonyi. Rushdie is suggesting that because a person has experienced violence in one context does not mean he or she can understand or connect with people who have experienced violence in another context. Moments of reciprocal recognition through physical connection can only happen on the local level with people of equal power or with people who at least are willing to forgo their power in the relationship. Max, on the other hand, is unwilling to give up this power and is unwilling to see the characters in the crowd as human and instead views them as a unified objectified whole.

Just as forming interpersonal relationships, even physical ones, does not automatically lead to healing and connection, the interpretation and exchange of body language does not lead to healing if mutual recognition is missing from the exchange. With all of the comparisons Rushdie makes between Shalimar and India, it seems like they will form a connection. Both have similar, comforting physical relationships with their fathers, both long for physical human contact, and both are physically connected to Boonyi. However because their personal desires conflict, they cannot connect. Shalimar wants to kill India to complete his revenge on Boonyi, and India wants revenge on Shalimar for killing her father. Therefore, even though both India and Shalimar know

how to communicate through body language, they use this knowledge to hurt not heal. After India testifies against Shalimar at his trial “she turned to face Shalimar the clown, and he understood perfectly what she did not need words to say. Now I have killed you, she told him. Now my arrow is in your heart and I am satisfied. When the time comes to execute you I will come and watch you die” (186). India communicates a message to Shalimar with her look, and Shalimar is able to correctly interpret this message. This is the same process that happens in some of the other novels covered, especially *Funny Boy*. However, because the message is hateful and devoid of recognition of pain, it further separates the two from each other. The novel ends with this failure to connect. Shalimar has just broken into India’s home with a knife to kill India, and India is armed with a bow to defend herself. At this point, reciprocal recognition is not even an option. Either India or Shalimar will probably kill the other. As the last line of the book states, “there was only Kashmira and Shalimar the clown (398). It is only the two of them together, but they are separate alienated entities.

Even though the personal aspirations and allegorical impulse of the characters prevents reciprocal recognition from occurring, Rushdie describes many of his characters longing for it. The characters know that reciprocal recognition can overcome alienation and try to create moments of recognition. India is clearly separated from her father when he dies. However, she recognizes him in her body, and tries to remain close to him by seeing him when she looks at herself in the mirror (15). She attempts to do the same with her mother. When Shalimar is arrested, India learns that he was her mother’s husband and that in the elevator he had seen Boonyi in her. This realization makes her want to see her mother in herself:

She went to her bedroom, stripped off her clothes and examined her body in the mirrored closet doors, kneeling on her bed, stretching, leaning, trying to see in her unclothed form what she had seen in her when she was fully attired. Straining to look beyond the echoes of her father and find the woman she had never been able to see. Slowly her mother's face began to form in her mind's eye, blurry out of focus, vague. (140)

Her attempts to see her mother in herself do not fully work. Her mother remains out of focus and vague. Even though it is easier to see her father in herself, this practice still does not reconnect her to him. The problem is that in both instances recognition cannot be reciprocal. India may be able to recognize her mother and father in her body, but they are dead. She can no longer have any new experiences of mutual recognition with her father; she can only remember past experiences. And in the past, she has had moments of reciprocal recognition through touch with her father: "When she was younger, they had often touched. He could place his lips against any part of her body, her hand, her cheek, her back, and find a bird in there and make it speak" (20). She vividly and longingly remembers her father's touch. Her father recognized her need to be touched and loved and she recognized that her father was conveying love. However, these moments of mutual recognition stopped occurring long before her father died. India distinctly remembers when he stopped caressing her: "One day he said, No more of that. She wanted to cry but controlled herself. Child-hood was over? Very well, then it was over" (21). Her father cannot recognize that India still needed the comfort of his touch. India longs to experience moments of mutual recognition as an adult, but cannot.

Ironically, Shalimar, who kills both of India's parents, also experiences mutual recognition through his father's touch as a child:

In the palm of his father's hand it wasn't soft or cushiony as a rich man's hand might have been, but hard and used and knowing. It was a hand that

knew what the world was and it did not shield you from the knowledge of the hardship in store. But it was a strong hand nevertheless and could protect you from those hardships. As long as Noman stayed in the valley of its skin nothing could touch him and there was nothing to fear. (57)

Shalimar literally and figuratively finds comfort in his father's hand. He finds security in his father's touch, and his father's hand is a symbol for the peace and protection his father and village give him. His memory of his father even helps him escape from prison. As he is racing along the wall of the prison he thinks about his father, "He needed to trust his father now. As long as he was held in his father's hand he could not fall" (394). As he remembers his father's touch he is able to do the impossible—walk on thin air (395).

The event is witnessed by others:

Many guards and villagers afterwards swore that they had seen the impossible . . . that a man had run flat-out off the corner of a walled area near the adjustment center on death row and had simply taken off, had continued on his way as if the wall stretched out into the sky" (395).

He is literally able to walk on air by remembering his father's touch. However, all he has to strengthen him is the memory of his father's touch and not the actual touch. As with India looking at herself in the mirror, the recognition is one sided. Shalimar can recognize the comfort his father gave him but his father being dead cannot recognize him. Shalimar, like India regrets that these moments of mutual recognition stopped after he grew up, and he continues to long to once more experience a moment of reciprocal recognition. Rushdie shows that moments of reciprocal recognition do occur. However, in *Shalimar the Clown*, these moments only occur in childhood. After childhood and after the characters start to allegorize, none of them are able to experience mutual recognition with others, and thus remain alienated. They want physical connection and

they try to achieve it through sex or other means, but without mutual recognition, physical connection is not healing.

Rushdie focuses on the longing for connection by his characters as adults, but he never shows the fulfillment of that desire. Never having moments of physical reciprocal recognition with her mother causes India her greatest emotional pain. However, she can never physically connect with her mother because she is dead and learning about her mother and adopting the name her mother originally gave her is a pale substitute.

Shalimar has a similar longing for physical connection. When Shalimar first meets India, he forgets momentarily about his quest to kill Max and wants to have a moment of connection with her. India, without knowing Shalimar's history, interprets that desire in his body language:

She had felt the driver wanting to touch her in the elevator, felt his tearful yearning. That was puzzling. No it was not puzzling. What was puzzling was that the need did not feel sexually charged. She felt herself transformed into an abstraction. As if by wanting to put his hands on her he hoped to reach out to someone else, across unknown dimensions of sad memory and lost event. As if she were just a representative, a sign. (13)

The audience comes to learn that Shalimar is the husband of India's dead mother Boonyi. He did not know that Boonyi had a child with Max but recognizes India as Boonyi's offspring because of India's physical similarity. He, like Hana with the English Patient, wants to use India as a pool, as a body into which he can shape what he needs it to be, in this case, his dead wife Boonyi. India does not feel diminished being treated as a stand in. She is instead curious about what it would be like to be the channel. However, they do not touch, and after Shalimar kills India's father, it becomes impossible for them to experience reciprocal recognition. Shalimar's actions when he first meets India again

illustrate the barrier that makes reciprocal recognition impossible for Rushdie's characters. Shalimar is not interested in recognizing India as an individual. He wants to physically reconnect with Boonyi and his idyllic past through India.

Boonyi after all of her suffering is able to overcome her own self-allegorical image. She knows that Shalimar is coming to kill her and accepts her fate, even hoping for a moment of reciprocal recognition before she dies. She attempts to create a setting where empathic body language can occur by stripping naked because "her body told the story of her life. The obesity of her insane time was gone but had left its wounds, the broken veins, and a looseness in the skin. She wanted him to see her story, to read the book of her nakedness, before he did what he had come to do" (317). She wants him to "read" her body, by interpreting the marks on her body and thus understanding her story. The most significant message she wants him to "read" is that she loves him (317). While Boonyi is ready for a moment of reciprocal recognition, Shalimar is not. Shalimar does read Boonyi's life story on her skin. He even holds her body in his hands as he reads it. However, this interpretation of the body through the gaze and physical connection does not lead to recognition and understanding. He does not understand that she is trying to communicate her love for him. Shalimar is so consumed with his desire for revenge, has spent so much time as an assassin and terrorist, that he cannot understand what she is trying to say. Rushdie, like Ondaatje and Selvadurai, feels that healing can come through moments of mutual recognition. However, Rushdie is more skeptical that these moments can occur, and thus only gestures towards them.

Rushdie uses allegory, at one level, to show the importance of polyvocality to the nation and to demonstrate how this polyvocality can easily be destroyed by a kind

polarizing extremism that labels nations as only one thing. At another level, Rushdie has his characters allegorize each other or themselves to demonstrate the way in which colonial naming impulses continue and continue to alienate characters from themselves. Rushdie finds allegorical naming so powerful that he sees it as a barrier preventing reciprocal recognition for his characters. However, Rushdie also feels polyvocality and reciprocal recognition are vital for creating healthy individuals and communities; therefore, he gestures toward that possibility as something that can occur only in childhood and in some imagined future.

Chapter 5 In a Pickle: The Importance of Polyvocality and the Failure of Recognition in *Midnight's Children*

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie constructs the protagonist and narrator Saleem's life as an allegory for India in its first thirty years after independence, showing that India failed to live up to its promise. But, at another level, as in *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie has his characters act as authors who allegorize themselves and others. Saleem is the most prevalent allegorist in the novel, using his life story to represent a heroic version of post-independence India. He discredits all other interpretations of his actions and focuses solely on this heroic interpretation even in his failures. Thus, while Rushdie is condemning the failure of post-independence India to allow for a polyvocal national identity, he is also making Saleem enact what he is condemning by his continual resistance and refutation of viewpoints that oppose his narrative about his life. Rushdie also delineates how the attempts of his characters to allegorize themselves and others, often through labels, is a barrier to mutual recognition.

Midnight's Children is the first person narrative of Saleem Sinai, who is writing his autobiography for his son. He is thirty, impotent, and physically falling apart. He is stuck working in a chutney factory and is writing about his early promise and why it did not come to fruition. The novel covers the history of his supposed grandparents and parents and then recounts how he was born in India at the exact moment India gained independence at midnight on August 15, 1947. It is revealed that Saleem was switched by Mary Pereira, who eventually becomes his nurse, soon after birth with Shiva who was born at exactly the same time as Saleem. Saleem grows up as a member of the middle class in Bombay while Shiva is raised in poverty. All the children who were born close

to midnight on August 15, 1947 have special powers. Saleem, who has a monstrous nose, at first has telepathic powers and communicates telepathically with the other midnight's children and creates the midnight's children conference in which these children communicate telepathically with each other through him. The members start arguing about their purpose and the conference disintegrates. Saleem loses his telepathic powers when his nose is drained of snot but then he gains an uncanny sense of smell.

He moves with his family to Pakistan and most of his family is killed when a bomb hits their house. Saleem is outside the house, so he is not killed by the explosion, but the explosion sends a spittoon flying from the house. The spittoon hits Saleem on the head, and he loses his memory. Without any memories, Saleem joins the Pakistan army and is part of the force sent to quell rebellion in Bangladesh. He is horrified at the atrocities committed, so he deserts the army, regains his memories, returns to India, and finally remembers his name when he meets Parvati-the-witch, who is one of the midnight children and knows Saleem from the midnight's children conference. She has a child, Aadam, by Shiva, marries Saleem, and Saleem adopts Aadam. During the emergency, Parvati-the-witch is killed, and Saleem is captured by the Widow's (Indira Gandhi) forces and tortured during the emergency. He reveals the location of the other midnight's children, who are then either killed or captured. Those who are captured, including Saleem, are sterilized. Saleem is released a broken man. He eventually returns to Bombay where he discovers that his old nurse Pereira owns a chutney factory. He becomes the manager of the factory and starts dating Padma, a worker there. At the end of the novel, Saleem is a broken man living only to take care of his son and write his life history.

Out of the novels I discuss, *Midnight's Children* has received the most critical attention. For instance, scholars such as Roger Y. Clark in *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other Worlds* and Catherine Cundy in *Salman Rushdie* explore Rushdie's incorporation of both Western and Eastern myths, content, and forms. Some scholars such as Michael Gorra in "'This Angrezi in which I am forced to write': On the Language of *Midnight's Children*" and Jaina C. Sanga in *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy, and Globalization* examine how Rushdie uses a mix of English and Urdu words and syntax. Other scholars such as Dorata Kolodziejzyk in "The Epigon Coming the First: *Midnight's Children* as the Postmodern Authentic" and Bishnupriya Ghosh in "An Invitation to Indian Postmodernity: Rushdie's English Vernacular as Situated Cultural Hybridity" explore *Midnight's Children* as a postmodern text. Dubravka Jurga in "'The Mirror of Us All': *Midnight's Children* and the Twentieth-Century Bildungsroman" and others have studied *Midnight's Children* as a Bildungsroman.

Several critics look at how Rushdie uses Saleem to allegorically represent Indian history and present his commentary on Indian as a modern independent nation. Scholars who take this approach include Neil Ten Kortenaar in "*Midnight's Children* and the Allegory of History," David W. Price in "Salman Rushdie's 'Use and Abuse of History' in *Midnight's Children*," Deepika Bahri in *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature*, Timothy Brennan in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, Anne Guttman in *The Nation of India in Contemporary Indian Literature*, Patrick Colm Hogan in "Midnight's Children": Kashmir and the Politics of Identity," John J. Su in "Epic of Failure: Disappointment as Utopian Fantasy in

Midnight's Children," and Teresa Heffernan in "Apocalyptic Narratives: The Nation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*." While many critics have commented on what I call Rushdie's first level of allegory, none have addressed his second level of allegory. Therefore, I differ from other critics by examining how Saleem acts as an allegorist and how his action as an allegorist prevent moments of mutual recognition from occurring.

In looking at the first level of allegory, Rushdie makes Saleem an allegory for the failures of post-independence India. Even though he is only in his thirties when he is writing his narrative, Saleem has had many failures. These failures, both emotional and physical, have left traces on his body:

Please believe that I am falling apart. I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this the opening gambit of some melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity. I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug—that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating. (43)

Rushdie connects this failing of Saleem's body to the degradation of India and its failure to live up to the promise of independence. Specifically, Rushdie suggests that India failed, once it freed itself from its colonial oppressors, to embrace a polyvocal identity as a country whose diverse religious and ethnic populations would be able to live together in harmony. The physical violence Saleem experiences such as being "brained by spittoons" has led to cracks and the disintegration of his body. Similarly, Independence has resulted in a disintegration of polyvocal harmony as religious and cultural divisions became solidified and led to violence conflicts between various groups. Independence also resulted in the Partition, which cracked India into India and Pakistan. This plan to prevent Islam/Hindu violence by making both countries religiously monolithic and not

polyvocal did not work and actually lead to increased violence. Saleem's physical cracks and falling apart symbolize the cracks and divisions in an India that has not lived up to the promise of unity many hoped would come with independence.

The allegorization of this disappointment is best seen in Saleem being switched at birth. The optimism many Indians felt at independence is reflected in Nehru's words, "At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India awakens to life and freedom. . . We have to build the noble mansion of free India, where all her children may dwell" (Goonetilleke 27). This statement constructs a free India as a polyvocal India saying independent India will be a place all her children, which can be interpreted to mean her diverse cultural groups, may dwell. Indians thought that with independence they were giving birth to one thing—peace, freedom, and acceptance of diversity—while independence actually gave birth to something else—violence and division. Likewise, Amina and Ahmed Sinai thought that the intelligent, astute Saleem was their biological child. They do not originally realize that Saleem and their biological child were switched at birth and their actual child was the violent Shiva. Even after Amina and Ahmed discover that Saleem is not their child, they still acknowledge him as such and do not search after their biological child. Similarly, as violence kept continuing in post-independence India, its leaders still spoke of it as a free peaceful nation and did not acknowledge that independence had given birth to violence.

By making Saleem an allegory for India, Rushdie also argues that post-independence India is tainted by Anglo influence. Saleem's biological parents are William Methwold, a British gentleman, and a poor Indian woman. Just as Saleem, the symbol of post-independence has a British father, British cultural and economic influence

still exists in India after independence. In fact, the Partition, which causes so much violence, was first suggested by the British.

Throughout the novel, Rushdie continues to use Saleem to make it clear that India has not lived up to the promise of independence. Saleem's tenth birthday is a disappointment. On his birthday, he begins to suspect that his mother is having an affair, which makes it difficult for him to enjoy his birthday. He says, "On my tenth birthday, everyone at Methwold's Estate tried hard to be cheerful, but beneath this thin veneer everyone was possessed by the same thought: 'Ten years, My God! Where have they gone? What have we done?'" (262). Just as Saleem's tenth birthday is a disappointment, the tenth anniversary of India as an independent country is a disappointment. People realize that India has remained violent and troubled. Saleem sums up the situation with "That's how it was when I was ten: nothing but trouble outside my head, nothing but miracles inside it" (263). India after ten years of independence is the same way. Externally it is having nothing but trouble, while in the hearts of the people there is still hope that it will live up to the promise of Independence.

Rushdie also used Saleem to allegorize how the Emergency betrayed the promise of a multicultural and polyvocal India. On June 25, 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of Emergency that gave her power to suspend elections and civil freedoms. She used this power to arrest those who were opposed to her government and practices. Saleem is captured and tortured during the Emergency by the Widow, who represents Indira Gandhi. Saleem becomes a symbol of the loss of polyvocality during the Emergency. Saleem, as he is being tortured, betrays the names of all of the other midnight's children to the Widow's torturers. The rest of the midnight's children are

captured and tortured. Eventually, all of the midnight's children, except for Saleem and Shiva are killed. The midnight's children are a symbol of polyvocality. They come from a variety of religious, economic, and geographical backgrounds. Each also has a unique special power. Thus, the midnight's children being killed by the Widow represents the silencing of polyvocality during the Emergency by Indira Gandhi. Also Saleem's betrayal of the midnight's children to the Widow is a symbol of the destruction of polyvocality during the first thirty years of India's independence and especially the Emergency.

While this use of allegory in the novel has been recounted by many critics, Rushdie also includes a second level of allegory. As with *Shalimar the Clown*, this second level of allegory consists of the characters allegorizing themselves and others, which becomes a barrier to reciprocal recognition. In *Midnight's Children*, allegorical labeling alienates people from each other. Saleem's Mother, Mumtaz experiences the oppressive power of labels. After her divorce from Nadir Khan, Mumtaz marries Ahmed Sinai, who he renames Amina. He justifies this by saying, "Time for a fresh start. Throw Mumtaz and her Nadir Khan out of the window. I'll choose you a new name" (78). According to Nicole Weickgennant, Ahmed does this to "cleanse her from her former marriage and reclaim her as virgin territory for himself" (70). He allegorizes Amina as virgin territory without a past by changing Amina's name. By renaming her, Ahmed Sinai wants Amina to be a new creature without any past whom he can construct to meet his needs. This attempt causes Amina alienation. She is forced to deny a past that has had a profound effect on her. It also causes her to be alienated from her husband. She hates his attempts to control her and erase her past. In resistance, she seeks out her past to the point that, years after her marriage to Ahmed, she has an affair with her ex-husband Nadir Khan.

Another instance of labeling occurs when one of Saleem's childhood friend's mother changes his name from Cyrus to Lord Kherson Khusrovand. She wants to transform him into a guru so he could become famous and wealthy, and she is successful. With the new name, Lord Khurso becomes "the most successful holy child in history" and gains "accountants, and tax havens, and a luxury liner" (341). Saleem, however, makes it clear the price Cyrus has to pay to please his mother. Saleem says, "And somewhere inside the faintly-smiling, benediction-scattering boy . . . in a place which was forever hidden by his mother's frighteningly efficient shadow, there lurked the ghost of a boy who had been my friend" (341). By being forced to adapt a new name and persona, Cyrus is alienated from himself and has to constantly put on an act. His new name also distances himself from those who knew him as Cyrus.

The use of a name to control can also be seen with Saleem's grandmother, Naseem. Naseem's family gives her the nicknamed Reverend Mother in an attempt to control and name what they fear. Naseem is a domineering figure who rules out of fear. Her family lessens their fear of her by giving her the ironic nickname of Reverend Mother, a religious title that references a figure of peace. While it does not make her more peaceful, it makes her cruelty more ironic and thus something to laugh at and not fear. Also, ironically, by giving Naseem a title of respect, it frees her family from having to respect her. It is also ironic in that Reverend Mother is an allusion to Catholicism, but Naseem is a devout Muslim (49). The family uses the term to mock her religiosity and resist her attempts to make them more religious. While the family uses the nickname to control her to the extent that they no longer have to fear and respect her, it also alienates

them from her. She becomes more of a stereotype, an allegorical representation of a certain attitude toward religion, rather than a family member.

Nicknames are common in Saleem's family, and his sister Jamila is originally nicknamed named the Brass Monkey because she has red hair and gets into trouble. This name locks her into the role of a trouble-maker despite her hair eventually turning brown. Ultimately, she is given the new nickname of Jamila the Singer after the family has moved to Pakistan when she is forced to sing at her fourteenth birthday party and it is discovered that she has an amazing singing voice (373). She is allegorized as the voice of Pakistan which is apparent in her subsequent nicknames—"Pakistan's Angel" and "Bulbul-of-the-faith." Even though Jamila the Singer is a nickname that is closer to her real name than the Brass Monkey, it causes her greater alienation. This alienation is seen in the costume she is forced to wear. She is forced "to wear a gold-and-white burqa at all times" which separates her from other people. About the effect of the name and burqa on Jamila, Saleem says, "publicity imprisoned her inside a gilded tent; and, being the new daughter-of-the-nation, her character began to owe more to the more strident aspects of the national persona than to the child-world of her Monkey years" (398). People used the nickname Jamila the Singer to shape her into an allegorical representative of Pakistan, not considering her wishes or desires.

Rushdie offers up the absence of names as a solution to the alienation caused by names. This is a solution, however, which ultimately fails. Saleem himself loses his name and memories when he is hit on the head by the spittoon (436). His nameless state frees him from the past; however, this freedom is destructive rather than liberating. It leaves him a numb blank slate without an identity. In this state, he does things he

would not normally do. He becomes a tracker for a Pakistani army unit that consists of him and three other soldiers, Ayooba, Farooq and Shaheed, and he aids in the violent attempt to quell the independence movement in Bangladesh. He participates in violence for Pakistan, a country he despise, even though he normally is not a violent person. Instead of enjoying the freedom of not having a name, Saleem frantically searches for his name, so he can reestablish a solid identity.

Saleem's fellow soldiers are also uneasy with Saleem's lack of a name. They do not know how to relate to a nameless individual; therefore, they named him buddha because he is seven years their senior and "because there hung around him an air of great antiquity. The buddha was old before his time" (445). Even though he has lost his memory and in many ways acts differently, he is still prideful and thus uses the ambiguity of the nickname buddha to increase his grandeur:

O fortunate ambiguity of transliteration! The Urdu word 'buddha', meaning old man, is pronounced with the Ds hard and plosive. But there is also Buddha, with soft-tongued Ds, meaning he-who-achieved-enlightenment-under-the-bodhi-tree. . . . In ancient India, Guatama the Buddha sat enlightened under a tree at Gaya; in the deer park at Sarnath he taught others to abstract themselves from worldly sorrows and achieve inner peace; and centuries later, Saleem the buddha sat under a different tree, unable to remember grief, numb as ice, wiped clean as a slate. (445)

The soldiers name him buddha because it means old man in Urdu. Saleem then uses the nickname buddha to make an allegorical connection between himself and the religious figure of Buddha and compares his situation with Buddha's. However, while Buddha's abstraction leads to peace, Saleem's leads to separation from others and his involvement in war.

It leads to separation because despite the nicknaming, the soldiers are uneasy with Saleem's blank slate state and do not know how to relate to him. Thus, they distance themselves from him. Saleem in turn, immersed in his quest for identity keeps himself aloof from the soldiers (416). Ironically, alienation, in this case, is caused by namelessness. Therefore, the naming process in and of itself does not lead to alienation; it is the meaning of the name and how the name is used that leads to alienation. Being nameless is also construed as being undesirable because it leads to the same alienation that naming often causes. Even after Saleem gets back his memory, he cannot remember his name. Memories are not enough. He needs to know his name to know who he is. As he tries to remember his name, he "can summon up only nicknames: Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Piece-of-the-Moon" (471). He has lost his given name, which he has used to center his own sense of identity. All he has are nicknames, which represent how others see him. He does not remember his name until he meets Parvati-the-witch, one of the midnight children. She recognizes him, and she calls him Saleem (482). He has to be renamed Saleem by someone who recognizes him and his pain before he can reclaim his name and his identity. This is a moment of recognition, but it is one sided. Parvati recognizes Saleem, but he does not recognize her or her suffering.

In opposition to Saleem regaining what he sees as his true name, some of the characters create fake ancestries. Ahmed Sinai, Saleem's father, creates a false ancestry, as does Firdaus in *Shalimar the Clown*. He falsely tells the British Methwold, after Methwold talked about his grand British ancestry that he is descended from Mughals. He even makes up a false family curse. These falsehoods cause more harm than good. Ahmed Sinai eventually believes in these falsehoods and forgets he made them up. He

eventually becomes afraid of becoming a victim of the fictional family curse (138). In an attempt to become more like the British he creates a false ancestry that alienates himself from his past and eventually ends up ruining his life with his self-fulfilling fictive curse.

Naming as a way to perpetuate Western colonial discourse is most clearly seen through the actions of Mr. Methwold. In *Midnight's Children*, the British Mr. Methwold is selling his estate, which consists of four houses in Bombay, and leaving India because of India's upcoming independence, but he is staying until the change actually occurs. He is selling his houses very cheaply. He, however, stipulates that the families who buy his houses, including Saleem's parents, retain all of Methwold's possessions, and that the buyers gather for a cocktail in the garden every evening, a British tradition (118-119).

Following these rules what happens is:

The Estate, the Methwold's Estate, is changing them. Every evening at six they are out in their gardens, celebrating the cocktail hour, and when William Methwold comes to call they slip effortlessly into their imitation Oxford drawls; and they are learning, about ceiling-fans and gas cookers and the correct diet for budgerigars, and Methwold, supervising their transformation, is mumbling under his breath. (123)

In a setting that is culturally European, the Indian residents adopt European mannerisms themselves. Methwold reinforces the estate as a vehicle for perpetuating Western colonialist discourse by naming the four houses after famous European palaces: Versailles villa, Buckingham villa, Escorial villa, and Sans Souci (117).

Methwold's attempts at cultural colonization continue to affect the residents after he leaves. Even though the Indian residents throw away most of the European trappings in the house, they are still affected by the discourse of superiority these trappings symbolize. Saleem remarks, "From the heights of Methwold's Estate, we looked down

on them all, on white and brown alike” (230). Long after Methwold has left, the notion that the residences of Methwold’s Estate are superior remains. Like Methwold, Saleem tries to mimic the Western process of classification according to colonial standards. For instance in talking about the time when he was first experimenting with his telepathic powers, Saleem says, “I was already beginning, in those days to classify people by their degree of internal tidiness, and to discover that I preferred the messier type” (272). Saleem is, for himself, setting up a hierarchy in which those with the most internal messiness are privileged.

Even positive attempts to name others are destructive. Saleem’s nanny, Mary Pereira, sings the same song to him throughout his childhood that include the lyrics “Anything you want to be, you kin be,/ You kin be just what-all you want” (160). Loretta Mijare discusses the negative consequences of this song, “It creates the illusion of self-determination that becomes Saleem’s lifelong burden. Through his repeated travails, Saleem discovers that he cannot be anything he wants to be” (134-135). Mary names Saleem as a person who can be whatever he wants to be, and because he internalizes this label he pursues a course where the ends justify the means and where he selfishly manipulates others to get what he wants. His attempts at self-fashioning ultimately fail, however, and hurt others. His actions alienate him from others, and he then becomes alienated from himself when he fails. He feels that he should be someone who gets whatever he wants, and he is frustrated that he cannot be that person.

While Rushdie is critical of all naming, he is especially critical of using English to name. Rushdie specifically points out the limits of English and how it is not always the most effective language. Nadir’s, Mumtaz’s first husband is forced to hide in Mumtaz’s

father's basement when he is falsely suspected of having been part of his boss's assassination. Even though Nadir and Mumtaz are married, they never have sex, and when Nadir has to flee because the police have found his hiding place, he leaves Mumtaz a note which just reads, "*Talaaq! Talaaq! Talaaq!*" (75). Saleem comments on the note saying, "The English lacks the thunderclap of sound of the Urdu, and anyway you know what it means. I divorce thee. I divorce thee. I divorce thee" (75). The note carries more weight being in Urdu than it would have in English. Throughout the novel, Rushdie often uses non-English words and grammar and uses words that are a mix of English and other languages to destabilize the centrality of English.

The way Saleem constructs his narrative reveals his desire to allegorize his life. In his narrative, Saleem tries to allegorize himself as the archetypal hero of India. He sees writing his life history as a way to achieve that. As Rushdie says about Saleem:

He sets out to write himself, in the hope that by doing so he may achieve the significance that the events of his adulthood have drained from him. He is no dispassionate, disinterested chronicler. He wants so to shape his material that the reader will be forced to concede his central role (Imaginary Homelands 24).

In his narrative, Saleem focuses on his strengths, such as telepathy, and makes his strengths seem grander than those of others. While all of the *Midnight's Children* have special powers, he says that he was given "the greatest talent of all—the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men" (255). This is a great talent, though that it is the greatest could be argued, and one would think it would lead to greater recognition because he would completely be able to learn the thoughts and desires of others. However, instead of using his abilities to recognize the needs of others, he uses them to achieve his own desires. He also feels, as the above passage shows, that his abilities

make him better than other people. He is jealous when a former class mate, Cyrus, becomes a famous guru because he thinks that should have been him because he is a “magic child” and Cyrus has no special powers (342).

He also thinks he is more influential than other people. When Padma mentions Cyrus drowning, Saleem says, “Few people who have come into contact with me have been vouchsafed a natural death” (342). His influence, according to Saleem, causes tragedy to come to others. He seems more proud than sorry for this fact. Saleem also makes himself seem heroic by downplaying his weaknesses. When he is ten years old, Saleem discovers his mother is having an affair and has no sympathy for her and for her situation as a woman in a loveless marriage. He says, “Perhaps she did it because of the growing impoverishment of her own life; but at the age of ten I wasn’t disposed to be sympathetic; and in my own way, I began to dream the dreams of revenge” (277). Saleem excuses his lack of sympathy and desire for revenge because he was so young. However, even when he is an adult and his behavior is no longer excusable, Saleem portrays a lack of sympathy towards others because he is so consumed with his desire for his life to have allegorical significance.

He also constructs himself as a hero by describing what many would consider weaknesses, such as his, and his Grandfather Doctor Aziz’s large noses, as strengths. Doctor Aziz’s friends ridicule Aziz’s nose and calls it “a cyranose,” “a proboscissimus,” saying “you could cross a river on that nose. (Its bridge was wide)” (12). Saleem, however, describes his grandfather’s nose as beautiful, “nostrils flaring, curvaceous as dancers. Between them swells the nose’s triumphal arch, first up and out, then down and under, sweeping in to his upper lip with a superb and at present red-tipped flick” (13).

He sees this nose as a birth-right he is proud of and calls it “comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed god Ganesh” (13). Saleem makes having a large nose a positive attribute by comparing it to Ganesh’s trunk. Ganesh is a Hindu Deva associated with wisdom and luck, and is known as the Lord of Beginnings and Remover of Obstacles. By allegorical association, then, Aziz and Saleem’s noses make them lucky and wise. In fact, Saleem makes the association more concrete by showing how his grandfather’s nose removed an obstacle and saved his grandfather’s life. In response to the April 17, 1919, riot in Amritsar, the military corals thousands, including Dr. Aziz, into a compound. Dr. Aziz sneezes, loses his balance, and falls to the floor as the military opens fire. Because he is on the ground, due to his nose, he is saved.

Saleem’s nose is even larger, more trunk-like and uglier than his grandfather’s.

Thus, according to Saleem’s understanding, he is even more heroic than his grandfather.

In describing his nose, Saleem says:

Between my eyes it mushroomed outwards and down wards as if all my expansionist forces, driven out of the rest of my body, had decided to concentrate on this single incomparable thrust . . . between my eyes and above my lips, my nose bloomed like a prize marrow. (196)

Instead of seeing his nose as ugly, he constructs it as beautiful. Originally a prestigious amount of snot comes out of his nose. Most would consider this a negative characteristic, but again Saleem is able to provide a positive spin. He concentrates on his snot giving him psychic powers. He is able to hear the thoughts of others and speak to others telepathically. After a doctor fixes his nose, he no longer produces large quantities of snot, and he loses his psychic powers, but he then develops an incredible sense of smell.

It is so good that he claims he can sniff out the atmosphere of specific moments from the past and hypocrisy (62, 389).

He further attempts to make himself seem heroic in his narrative by spending so much time and effort building up to his birth. All through Book I, he alludes to his birth and says it will be a grand event. He even includes a prophecy that discusses how momentous his birth will be. When he is about to describe his birth, Saleem says:

I shall not describe the mass blood-letting in progress on the frontiers of the divided Punjab (where the partitioned nations are washing themselves in one another's blood) . . . I shall avert my eyes from the violence in Bengal and the long pacifying walk of Mahatma Gandhi. Selfish? Narrow-minded? Well, perhaps; but excusably so, in my opinion. After all, one is not born every day. (141)

Saleem is rationalizing his focusing on his birth instead of on the violence associated with the partition and Indian independence. He is saying that his birth is more important than the violence. This strategy works against him, however. He brings up things that are more influential than his birth, which makes the audience question why he did not discuss those things, especially if the reader does not accept his excuse.

It is especially hard for the reader to accept his excuse because the birth Saleem has been leading up to turns out not to be his. It is revealed that he was switched at birth with Shiva, Ahmed Sinai and Amina's actual child, by the nurse Mary Pereira. Even though for a long time Saleem and his family do not realize it, he is not related to Aziz, Naseem, Ahmed Sinai, and Amina by blood. He actually is the product of an affair between the British William Methwold and a poor lower class woman. The readers are betrayed by Saleem. He does not give them the story he implied he was going to give

them. He implied that he was telling the story of his ancestors; when in fact, he is not talking about the people who were his blood relatives but only his accidental relatives.

Saleem tries to excuse his actions by depicting the biological realities as meaningless. After he recounts his actual heritage, he says that it changed nothing that his family still treated him like their son. However, this turns out to be just another lie by Saleem. When he does tell the story about his parents discovering his true heritage, the reader learns that it did make a difference, and his family did start to distance themselves from him. In fact, his parents send him to live with his uncle and aunt for a time after a blood test reveals that Saleem is not their child. Even after he returns home, his father completely ignores him (320). But Saleem deemphasizes this alienation from his family by constantly lying to the reader to make himself more heroic. According to James Harrison, "Saleem is one of literature's most consummately unreliable narrators" (427). Rushdie has even written an essay, collected in *Imaginary Homelands*, titled "'Errata': or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*". Ironically, as Saleem lies more and more to make his life seem heroic, he alienates the readers and makes them view him as less and less heroic.

Along with focusing on his birth instead of India's independence, Saleem ties everything, even things that seem unrelated, back to his own life. After a gang of cats invades Methwold's Estate, Evie makes money killing the Cats. The Brass Monkey, who is a lover of cats, disapproves of Evie's actions and starts a fight with her. Saleem, however, allegorizing the fight as being about him:

 Holding before my eyes the image of Monkey and Evie rolling in the dirt, I seem to discern the driving force behind their battle to the death, a motive far deeper than the mere persecution of cats; they were fighting over me. Evie and my sister kicked and scratched, ostensibly over the fact of a few

thirsty strays; but perhaps Evie's kicks were aimed at me, perhaps they were the violence of her anger at my invasion of her head; and maybe the strength of the Monkey was the strength of sibling loyalty, and her act of war was actually an act of love. (287)

Although Saleem has absolutely no proof that Evie and the Monkey were fighting over him, he still conceitedly thinks that they were. He betrays his high opinion of himself by assuming he was a far deeper and important motivation for fighting than the persecution of cats. Similarly he has a dream of his schoolmate Jimmy Kapadia dying and discovers the next day that Jimmy had died that night of a heart seizure. With no proof, Saleem thinks he killed Jimmy by having him die in his dreams (316).

I mentioned previously that Saleem tries to make his life seem heroic by spending so much time and effort building up to his birth. He lets the reader know how much effort it is taking him to write his narrative in order to make his life seem more significant. At one point he says, "fever or no fever, I must press on; because, having (for the moment) exhausted this strain of old-time fabulism, I am coming to the fantastic heart of my own story, and must write in plain unveiled fashion, about the midnight children" (248). He says he is willing to overcome any obstacle, including being sick, and to sacrifice whatever is necessary, for instance his health, to write his narrative. Also he uses this passage to emphasize what he considers one of his greatest triumphs, the creation of the midnight's children conference. It is so important that he says he will write about it despite being sick and write about it in plain language so everyone can understand it. However, like the rest of the narrative, his experiences with the midnight's children conference leads to disappointment. His creation of the conference introduces him to all the midnight children and makes it possible for him to betray them to Indira Gandhi's torturers during the emergency (551).

Saleem also makes himself appear heroic by not being accountable for his mistakes but blaming them on others. He names himself as a victim and says, “FROM AYAH TO Widow, I’m the sort of person *to whom things have been done*” (301). Specifically, things have been done to him by women. In saying he has been a victim, he focuses on his Ayah and the Widow, both women. He blames his failures on the women in his life. He makes himself heroic by transforming women into monsters. While Saleem sees the ugly and deformed in a positive light, it becomes clear that this view of the grotesque is gendered. According to Weickgenannt, “There is a strong tendency in *Midnight’s Children* to portray its female characters as endowed with a form of monstrosity which is in general directed against men and which leaves them either dead or emasculated” (72). The men in the novel label women as monstrous when they will not adhere to patriarchal control. This labeling uncovers the hypocrisy on the part of post-independence Indian men. They want freedom, but are not willing to allow women to have those same freedoms. The men, however, cannot fully repress the power of women, and in *Midnight’s Children*, women often use their power to critique patriarchal discourse. However, this use of power leads to the women being labeled as monstrous and a threat to male power (72). This is best seen in Saleem’s treatment of Naseem. Naseem tries to be her own woman who cannot and should not be controlled by her husband, but Naseem, as depicted by Saleem becomes “vampire-like, sucking out the life of her hapless husband” (Weickgenannt 72).

Saleem is making a direct correlation between Naseem’s rise in power and energy and the diminution of Dr. Aziz. She is seen as a monster deliberately sucking the life out of him:

As he declined, Reverend Mother grew larger and stronger; she, who had once wailed pitifully at the sight of Mercurochrome, now appeared to thrive on his [Dr. Aziz's] weakness, as though their marriage had been one of those mythical unions in which succubi appear to men as innocent damsels, and, after luring them into the matrimonial bed, regain their true, awful aspect and begin to swallow their souls. (348)

The Mercurochrome refers to an incident early in their marriage when Dr. Aziz spills Mercurochrome, a type of medicine that is red, on his hands, and Naseem cries because she thinks it is blood, and Dr. Aziz chides her for being silly (46). At the beginning of the marriage Dr. Aziz is the powerful figure in the relationship, but Naseem eventually becomes dominant over him. Saleem symbolizes her dominance by comparing her to a Succubus. In Saleem's schema, equality is not possible. Either the man or the woman has more power. If the man has more power, it is as it should be, and if the woman has more, she is monstrous, and the situation is unnatural. Women who become powerful are usually seen as monsters in *Midnight's Children* because Saleem views women's power as inherently dangerous (72). However, just because the novel portrays powerful women as monstrous, does not mean that Rushdie shares this view.

Rushdie's reasons for portraying women as monstrous can be seen in his depiction of the widow Durga. In describing Durga, Saleem says, "She was a woman whose biceps bulged; whose preternatural breasts unleashed a torrent of milk capable of nourishing regiments; and who, it was rumoured darkly (although I suspect the rumour of being started by herself) had two wombs" (566). Durga is grotesque. Specifically, she is the opposite of the feminine. She has large biceps, which is against the stereotype of the average woman. She is at the same time hyper feminine. Her ability to lactate is prodigious and instead of one womb she possibly has two. Saleem sees Durga as the "culmination of the monstrous women who seem to dominate the nation and reduce men

to shadows of their former selves. Durga stands for the emasculation of the failed saviour, Picture Singh” (Weickgennant 72-73). Saleem compares Durga draining the life of Picture Singh, a communist snake charmer who is Saleem’s last father figure, to his Grandmother draining the life out of his grandfather. Saleem uses images such as “succubus” and “bloodsucker lizard in human form” to more clearly constructs Durga as a monster (567). From beginning to end, Saleem sees women as monsters preying on men who would be successful save for the women in their lives. Rushdie makes it clear that it is Saleem that views women as monstrous, and Rushdie makes this view seem ridiculous.

The entire novel is seen through the eyes of Saleem, and it is Saleem who sees women as monstrous. He blames women for ruining men’s capacity to “fulfill the promises of the independent nation” (Weickgennant 72-73). He blames his failures on women and does not accept fault. He also cannot recognize women as subjects because he cannot visualize an equal relationship between men and women. However, the reader questions Saleem’s attitudes toward women because Saleem has been an unreliable and ineffectual narrator. By giving a narrator such as him misogynistic views, it makes the reader question the views themselves and the selfishness behind these views. Also, even though Saleem labels these women as monstrous, he cannot deny that these women have power. Saleem even admits that the women in his life have had more power than the men in his life: “Women have always been the ones to change my life: Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Jamila Singer, Parvati-the-witch must answer for who I am; and the Widow, who I’m keeping for the end; and after the end, Padma, my goddess of dung” (244). Saleem sees women as powerful, but in a negative light. He blames the women for what he has

become, for his own failures. Because he labels these women as monstrous, he alienates himself from them and gives himself an excuse not to recognize their pain. Why would anyone care about acknowledging the pain of a monster? However, Rushdie makes it clear that Saleem's failures are his own and, in most instances, the women of the novel use their power more responsibly than he does.

Saleem, however, will not take the blame for his failures and further excuses them by saying they led to success. When talking about his experiences with Evie, he says, "The siren temptations of Evie Burns—who never cared about me, I'm bound to admit—led me inexorably toward my fall. (But I hold nothing against her; because my fall led to a rise)" (237). Because of his love for Evie, he accepts her offer to let him ride her bike, even though he does not know how to ride a bike. He crashes into Sonny, receives a concussion, and ruins Evie's bike, which makes her hate him forever. However, hitting his head allows him to hear the voices of the midnight's children and makes the creation of the midnight's children conference possible (238).

In the few sections where readers are able to see how other characters view Saleem, as opposed to how Saleem presents himself, it becomes possible to see how conceited Saleem truly is. As will be discussed later, Padma often views Saleem negatively, especially in her reactions to his narrative. Also, when Saleem is reunited with his Aunt Sonia whom he has not seen for years, she says, "Saleem, is it? Yes I remember you. Nasty little brat you were. Always thought you were growing up to be God or what" (497). Saleem discounts Sonia's words as the ravings of a jealous woman. He attempts to silence all opposing viewpoints and present a narrative solely from his perspective. However, it is not as easy for the readers to discount Sonia's words. She

says he thought he was going to be a God soon after he admits he had Messianic ambitions, and there is plenty of evidence in Saleem's actions and words to support his aunt's opinion.

Because he wants to be viewed by his readers as a hero, to be allegorized as a Messianic or God figure, what he fears most in writing about his life is that the opposite will happen and his account will seem ridiculous, which is exactly what happens (7). For instance, Padma, his girlfriend who he is reading his written account to, chastises Saleem for mocking her name because she is named after the Dung Goddess. Padma insists that there is nothing wrong with being named after the Dung Goddess, so Saleem in his narrative includes a paean to dung:

Dung, that fertilizes and causes the groups to grow! Dung which is patted into thin chapatti-like cakes when still fresh and moist, and is sold to the village builders, who use it to secure and strengthen the walls of kachcha buildings made of mud! Dung, whose arrival from the nether end of cattle goes a long way toward explaining their divine and sacred status! Oh, yes, I was wrong, I admit I was prejudiced, no doubt because it's unfortunate odours do have a way of offending my sensitive nose-how wonderful, how ineffable lovely it must be to be named for the Purveyor of Dung! (36)

Saleem writes the paean to mock Padma, but because it is so silly and a bit sacrilegious, it casts a negative light on Saleem. It seems too ridiculous to include in an autobiography, especially since Saleem is connecting his life to the history of post independence India. By making Saleem, the symbol of post independence, absurd, Rushdie is illustrating how post-independence India often acted absurdly. The paean also reveals Saleem's aspirations. He mocks his girlfriend to make himself seem grander.

Saleem's position at the end of the novel ultimately reveals that his attempts to immortalize himself have been absurd and selfish. He is castrated, which was part of his

torture at the hands of the Widow during the emergency, and is physically falling apart. He has lost most of the people he has loved. His betrayal has led to the deaths of the midnight's children. At the end of the book, his promise as a midnight's child has led to defeat not success. However, he still attempts to position himself as better than others through allegory and does not allow his struggles to humble him enough to recognize the needs of others.

Saleem alludes to the power of the physical, but his physicality is ineffectual. Saleem attempts to make his narrative seem important by using language that references physicality, describing his project, "History pours out of my fissured body" (45). His body, even as decrepit and deformed as it is, is important because it is the source of history. Saleem privileges this source of history over other sources. He latter on makes his narrative more tangible and concrete by using food to allegorize his narrative:

Family history, of course, has its proper dietary laws. One is supposed to swallow and digest only the permitted parts of it, the halal portions of the past, drained of their redness, their blood. Unfortunately, this makes the stories less juicy; so I am about to become the first and only member of my family to flout the laws of halal. Letting no blood escape from the body of the tale, I arrive at the unspeakable part; and, undaunted, press on. (72)

Using this metaphor of food for stories gives Saleem an excuse to speak the unspeakable. He must share the family's secrets because they make the story juicy and tasty. He is telling the family's secrets not to help his family, but to make his story more interesting.

One of the forms of physicality Saleem focuses on to make his narrative more concrete is the fragmented body. When Dr. Aziz, Saleem's grandfather, first meets Naseem, his future wife, it is as a physician. However, because he is a young unmarried man and a she is a young married woman, he is not allowed to examine her body in total.

Instead she is hidden by a perforated sheet with a hole. He has her lift the hole up to the body part that is ailing her so he can examine it. She is constantly being sick in different areas of her body, even eventually her more intimate areas, and Dr. Aziz is continuously being sent for to examine these different body parts until he has seen and touched most of her body albeit in fragments. Even though he touches her body, these touches do not lead to recognition. He does it to discover her illnesses and for his own pleasure. By encountering her in fragment form, he is able to use his imagination to arrange these fragments in any way he sees fit, and he falls in love with this imaginary collage:

The phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams. Glued together by his imagination, she accompanied him on his rounds, she moved into the front room of his mind, so that waking and sleeping he could feel in his fingertips the softness of her ticklish skin or the perfect tiny wrists. (28)

It is easier for him to fall in love with this fragmented body than it would have been to fall physically in love with Naseem if he had seen her body all at once because the fragmented body has a romantic air of mystery about it and allows him to use his imagination (25-29).

Ahmed's reconstruction of Naseem's fragments alienates him from recognizing who Naseem is holistically. He is more interested in the imaginary collage he constructed than he is in Naseem. He is disappointed when the sheet is removed and she does not fit his romantic image. This disappointment fully registers as the marriage progresses, and he comes home one day to find:

. . . waiting for him in the courtyard filled with malevolent geese were the disapproving features of my grandmamma, Naseem Aziz, who he had made the mistake of loving in fragments, and who was now unified and transmuted into the formidable figure she would always remain. (47)

Dr. Aziz realizes that loving Naseem in fragments was a mistake because the unified Naseem does not live up to the promise of the fragments. Naseem becomes a formidable figure who rules her family and Dr. Aziz with an iron fist. Their marriage is often filled with conflict and does not live up to the romance of the perforated sheet. Even though this example of physical fragmentation includes touch, it does not lead to moments of mutual recognition.

Amina, Naseem and Aziz's daughter also finds fragmentation to be a substitution for recognition. Amina initially has trouble loving her new husband Ahmed Sinai so:

She divided him, mentally, into every single one of his component parts, physically as well as behavioral, compartmentalizing him into lips and verbal tics and prejudices and likes. . . in short, she fell under the spell of the perforated sheet of her own parents, because she resolved to fall in love with her husband bit by bit. (83)

Amina has trouble falling in love with her husband as a whole, so she, like her father, falls in love with fragments. As she falls in love with more and more bits of Ahmed Sinai, she realizes that she loves him. However, as she loves him bit by bit, she unconsciously influences him to change bit by bit until he physically resembles her first husband Nadir Khan (84). She loves him not for who he is but for who she is making him become. Because she is turning Ahmed into Nadir piece by piece, she is not consciously aware of her actions. This love is does not come from reciprocal recognition because she does not love Ahmed for himself but has to transform him, albeit unconsciously, into someone else in order to love him.

Without recognition, the body becomes a site of violence and war rather than healing. As emotions can be witnessed in the body so can the memory of violence. Dr. Aziz gets caught up in the April 17, 1919 riot in Amritsaar, Kashmir. The military corals

thousands into a compound, where they are shot. As bodies fall on Dr. Aziz, the clasp of his badge digs into his chest, causing a bruise that does not fade until his death (42). The bruise commemorates the tragedy in his body. Later, Naseem and Dr. Aziz's arguments become more significant and destructive as they enter the realm of the physical. Aziz and Naseem constantly argue over religious instruction for the children. When Aziz throws out the religious instructor, Naseem refuses to feed Aziz. In retaliation, Aziz refuses to eat even when he is away from the house. This is a battle of wills to determine who will give in first. However, this is a serious detriment to Aziz's health: "His body had become a battlefield and each day a piece of it was blasted away" (51). To stop her husband from killing himself over the argument, she pretends to fall physically sick, her eldest daughter does the cooking for a few days, feeding her father, and when Naseem recovers, she feeds Aziz as if nothing had happened (51).

Saleem despite his impulse to allegorize yearns for connection with others, but tries to create this connection outside his body. He psychically connects all of the midnight's children throughout India, so they can hear each other's thoughts, and he calls the group the midnight children's conference. He feels that this group of children can solve all the problems of independent India. However, this plan fails. His noble ideas about a democracy are tarnished by Shiva who wants Saleem and himself to be the leaders of this gang. Saleem himself is tempted to set himself as the leader of the group. He feels justified in this desire because he created the conference (289). The group members become distracted by their own lives and adapt the prejudices of their parents, which leads to divisions in the conference (323). Because of these factors the group

eventually disbands. Saleem eventually loses his psychic powers, betrays the conference, and most of the midnight's children are killed. According to Patrick Colm Hogan:

What Saleem tries to establish through telepathy is a sort of transgeographical, modern localism. He in effect seeks to reestablish practical identity within the modern context of rival categorical identities. His mind, where all the children meet, becomes the site for a different sort of local, practical engagement. (524)

Saleem is trying to form a local community without the localness. He wants to create a community that is tight knit but without the face-to-face interactions. However, face-to-face interactions are necessary for moments of mutual recognition. Psychic or technological substitutes that connect people over large distances and try to create moments of reciprocal recognition without any physical connections ultimately fail in the novel.

Even though Saleem claims he is using his telepathic powers to establish the conference for noble reasons, his initial uses of his telepathic powers makes the reader question his intentions and the effectiveness of his conference. Saleem first uses his telepathic abilities for selfish reasons. He uses them to spy on other people or to cheat on tests. He also uses them to invade the thoughts of Evie Burns, a girl he likes, and violently tries to discover her darkest secrets. Because Saleem first uses his powers to improve his situation, it is easy for the reader to interpret his creation of the conference as part of the same goal.

There are, however, moments in the novel where characters form connections based on touch, even though they are not sustained. This even happens between characters that are initially strangers and from different backgrounds. For instance, Amina goes to see a fortune-teller in a poorer section of the city, which is a traumatic

journey for her. When she gets there, she is at first suspicious of the fortune-teller.

However, her attitude changes after he asks her permission to touch her:

And did my mother, just as strangely, reply, 'Yes, I permit,' so that the seer became only the third man to touch her in her life, apart from her family members?—and was it then, at that instant, that a brief sharp jolt of electricity passed between pudgy fingers and maternal skin? (108)

This experience is particularly memorable because the fortune-teller is only the third man she is not related to that has touched her. This is especially significant because she married the first two men. As they touch, a connection is made with a jolt of electricity, foreshadowing how important his prophecy about Saleem will be. Although she never sees the fortuneteller again, this prophecy is made more potent through the touch. She is able to recognize the fortuneteller as an agent who can impact her life. However, because she loses connection with the fortuneteller and the connection is displaced onto the prophecy, this experience does not lead to healing. Instead, she finds the prophecy confusing and disturbing with lines such as, "There will be two heads—but you shall see only one." Even though the prophecy has a negative effect on her, it is still a momentous and physical effect: "To tell the truth, as Amina's pregnancy progressed, she had found the words of the fortune-teller pressing more and more heavily down upon her shoulders, her head, her swelling balloon" (124).

At times, characters long to connect through touch but this longing is never fulfilled. This is seen as Saleem uses his telepathic powers to spy on his mother who is on a secret rendezvous with her ex-husband. Saleem specifically observes their hands while comparing his voyeurism to watching a movie:

. . . hands longing for touch, hands outstretching tensing quivering demanding to be—but always at last jerking back, fingertips avoiding fingertips,

because what I'm watching here on my dirty glass cinema-screen is, after all, an Indian movie, in which physical contact is forbidden lest it corrupt the watching flower of India youth. . . two strangers, each baring a screen-name which is not the name of their birth, act out their half-unwanted roles. (376)

They desperately want to touch but they don't, both thinking about the taboos against touching. Amina and Nadir Khan do not experience physical reciprocal recognition because they are more concerned about how society would look on them rather than on the needs of each other, even though Amina is breaking taboos by being a married woman eating lunch with a single man. Without this recognition, they cannot overcome the distancing effect of names. Both have been renamed. Nadir Khan is now Quasim Khan or Quasim the red because of his involvement in the communist party (275). Even though the two had been married at one point, the new names cause them to be strangers to each other. These names force them to act out identities they are not fully comfortable with, roles that make it hard from them to touch.

Despite the possibility, meaningful connections never develop between characters, and some characters even selfishly resist all attachments. The best example of this is that Saleem's sister resists interpersonal connection to the extent that she reacts "violently to any declarations of affection" and the "soft words of lovers roused in her an almost animal rage" (233). When a boy, Sonny, declares his love for her when they are both nine, she makes "him suffer for his love—telling tales to his mother; pushing him into mud-puddles, accidentally-on-purpose; once even assaulting him physically" (234). Because she resists all overtures for interpersonal connection, Brass Monkey remains one of the most isolated, alienated characters in the novel. Similarly, Saleem's father, Ahmed Sinai, feels betrayed when his business partner dies, which causes the business to

collapse. This experience shows him “the unreliable nature of human relationships; he had decided to divest himself of all such ties (257). He locks himself in his office for most of the day and only interacts with others through the telephone (257). Like Brass Monkey, Ahmed Sinai chooses and creates his own alienation. He hangs on to his wounded pride instead of risking being hurt again by reaching out to others. Because he is unwilling to reach out to others and recognize their suffering, he lives in a perpetual state of alienation.

Rushdie shows that the longing for touch and connection can be destructive if not pursued in the correct manner. When Saleem is in the Pakistani unit with the three other soldiers, they get lost in the jungles of the Sundarbans and find refuge in a temple dedicated to Kali. Each night the four men are visited by four supernatural, ghostlike women, and “the travelers abandoned themselves to the caresses which felt real enough, to kisses and love-bites which were soft and painful, to scratches which left marks, and they realized that this this this was what they had needed, what they had longed for without knowing it” (467). At first it seems as if these women are fulfilling the men’s unconscious desires for physical connection. These nightly visits go on, until one day the men look at each other and realize they are becoming transparent. The supernatural beings are preying on the men’s longing for physical connection in order to feed off of their dreams and desires and the men realize this just in enough time to barely escape with their lives (467).

At times, it seems like the relationship between Saleem and Padma will include moments of reciprocal recognition. She is physically present when Saleem is writing, and Saleem admits the Padma’s physical presence affects him. In reference to Padma, he

talks about how people “have a way of leaking into each other” and compares this to flavors mixing when you cook (44-45). Even though he is writing an autobiography, because she is there while he is writing it, she slowly seeps into the narrative and becomes a vital part of it. One would think then, that Saleem’s book is tangible proof that mutual recognition has occurred between Saleem and Padma. However, despite the physical effect each has on the other, recognition is missing, and without this recognition, the connection between these two characters is fragile. Padma does not understand or try to understand Saleem’s project. She ridicules his writing and wonders what can be so precious in it. She tries to steer him away from his writing and to more immediate physical matters such as eating (26). At one point she shouts, “O God, you and your stories. . . all day, all night—you have made yourself sick! Stop some time, na, what will it hurt?” (264).

When she does express concern for Saleem’s narrative, she expresses concern for other characters, especially Mary Pereira, and not Saleem, which causes Saleem to be jealous (357). Padma in turn is jealous of Saleem’s writing. She feels that he spends more time with it than with her and that it is more important to him than her (246). She is right. Even though Saleem does care for Padma, he views his writing as more important. He views it as grand and momentous while he sees Padma as common and ordinary. Padma is also illiterate, which sets up an unequal power relationship between her and Saleem. She can only access his written account through Saleem, and Saleem has control over what he reads to her. Saleem’s project and his desire to allegorize himself divide them and create a barrier to reciprocal recognition. Padma’s lack of recognition is further seen in her reactions to Saleem’s narrative, which are always negative. Even when

Saleem eloquently describes how grand she is, Padma thinks he is being feverous and says, “Let me feel your forehead!” (248). Padma does not recognize that Saleem wants encouragement and instead brutally tells him her honest opinion.

Padma’s lack of recognition of Saleem’s needs is specifically seen in her sexual desires. She wants to have sex with Saleem even though his torture at the hand of the Widow during the emergency has made him impotent. However, Padma is concerned about her own sexual needs and forces Saleem to keep trying to have sex with her not considering the humiliation and frustration these failed attempts cause him. She even, to fulfill her desires, secretly gives him a love potion to cure his impotence. Instead of curing him, it makes him sick (246). Later on it is revealed that Saleem is not just impotent, he is castrated (568). This knowledge reveals Padma’s actions to be extremely ridiculous, conceited, and insensitive. Padma ultimately dismisses Saleem’s entire narrative and the message he is trying to convey. As Saleem sees it, “Padma, by proposing a marriage, revealed her willingness to dismiss everything I’ve told her about my past as just so much ‘fancy talk’” (565). Padma cannot understand the toll Saleem’s experiences have taken on him. He is broken, falling apart, dying, and not fit to marry. Padma ignores this message and focuses on her own desires to marry Saleem. She also ignores the overall negativity of Saleem’s narrative and dreams of their marriage and a honeymoon to Kashmir (565).

Padma does not only act as an actual character, she also plays a symbolic role in the novel. According to Catherine Cundy, “She is not merely a symbol of the Indian Storyteller’s audience—its captivity or credulity crystallized into a single identity—but a symbol also of a wider critical position in relation to the narrative mode itself” (32).

Padma symbolizes Rushdie's critique of the narrative mode. Padma works so well as a symbol because she is more relatable to the audience than Saleem. She is reliable, strong, and honest as opposed to the weak, prideful, unreliable, and manipulative Saleem. Because the relatable Padma constantly questions Saleem's narrative, the reader starts to question Saleem's narrative and his attempts to be grandiose. Saleem will often use circular, flowery language that is confusing while not saying much of significance, and Padma makes it clear that he is getting off track. For instance, at one point Saleem says:

I have titled this episode somewhat oddly. 'Alpha and Omega' stares back at me from the page, demanding to be explained—a curious heading for what will be my story's half-way point, one that reeks of beginnings and ends, when you could say it should be more concerned with middles; but, unrepentantly, I have no intention of changing it, although there are many alternative titles, for instance 'From Monkey to Rhesus', or 'Finger Redux', or—in a more allusive style—'The Gander', a reference, obviously, to the mythical bird. (283)

Padma's reaction to hearing Saleem read this rambling convoluted introduction to the chapter is to say, "You're talking funny again. . . Are you going to tell about Evie or not?" (283). Padma does not care about artistry or philosophizing. She cares only for the story. Padma's presence makes the context of Saleem's narrative clear and "emphasizes the fact that this story does not transcend the conditions of its telling, but is rather, shaped by those conditions" (Teverson 49). Saleem wants to tell a grand allegory, but Padma's presence makes the impossibility of his desires clear and makes it clear that all narrative is limited by its context.

Rushdie is making it clear "that all speech and writing comes from somewhere and is, therefore, shaped by the subjective concerns of an unreliable individual, performing to meet the demands of a fickle audience, and informed by the historical and ideological agendas of a unique cultural location" (Teverson 49). Specifically, with

Saleem's narrative, Rushdie shows how it is shaped by Saleem's desire to turn his life into a heroic allegory, which prevents him from experience moments of reciprocal recognition with others, including the reader. Padma, along with symbolizing Rushdie's critique, also becomes the means through which Rushdie alienates his audience from Saleem. As Harrison says, "This same unreliability does nonetheless foster a skeptical attitude in the reader toward the narrator, toward the author, and toward language itself" (65). The audience most clearly realizes Saleem's unreliability through Padma's reactions. Padma often reflects the attitude of the reader. This happens when Padma learns that that Saleem is not the biological son of Ahmed Sinai and Amina but is actually the offspring of a British gentleman and a poor Indian woman:

"'An Anglo?' Padma expresses in horror. 'What are you telling me? You are an Anglo-Indian? Your name is not your own?' . . . 'you tricked me. Your mother, you called her; your father, your grandfather, your aunts. What thing are you that you don't even care to tell the truth about who your parents were?' (148)

The reader's sense of betrayal is articulated and intensified by Padma's sense of betrayal. Padma consistently questions the validity of Saleem's account to the point that Saleem notices and acknowledges that she is uncertain of his reliability (269). It becomes clearer and clearer as the novel progresses that Saleem is an unreliable narrator, and both Padma and the reader become more and more disillusioned by Saleem's narrative.

Saleem sees his life as allegory of India. He not only thinks that there is a metaphorical connection between his life and India, but he also believes that his actions affect and even control the whole nation. At one point he says, "I was the puppet-master, and the nation performed my play" (332). Even though Rushdie is using as an allegory for Saleem, he is also, ironically, critical of Saleem attempts to allegorize his life,

showing how these attempts make Saleem conceited and isolated. Saleem's conceitedness reaches its highest level after he regains his memories and returns to India. He sees the despicable state India is in and vows to save it, even calling his ambitions Messianic (495). His desire to be allegorical prevents him from recognizing the needs of others. He abandons Parvati-the-witch, who needs the comfort of another person, to pursue his dream of being India's savior (494).

Even though Rushdie can allegorize Saleem's life, Saleem's own allegorical reading of his life is obviously errant. For instance, Saleem lists a chain of events that happens when he stands up to the teacher who mocks his face as the map of India. This list ends with:

And then my grandfather would not have gone to Kashmir and been broken by the effort of climbing the Sankara Acharaya hill. And my grandfather was the founder of my family, and my fate was linked by my birthday to that of the nation, and the father of the nation was Nehru. Nehru's death; can I avoid the conclusion that that, too, was all my fault (354).

Even if the reader is convinced that Saleem is responsible for his grandfather's death, it is farfetched to assume that Saleem is responsible for Nehru's death. Also, even if the audience accepts Saleem's claim that his actions affect India, the consequences, such as the death of Nehru, are always negative. Furthermore, even though he wants to save India, he contributes to one of its darkest hours, the emergency, by betraying the midnight's children to the Widow (551). He cannot make India a better place, but is instead alienated from the truth of who he actually is—a powerless man who is responsible for his own inadequacies.

Saleem's conceitedness is apparent as he resists the attempts of other characters to allegorize him as India. One of Saleem's teachers, in mocking his ugliness, says that the

map of India is in Saleem's face. He says Saleem's nose is Decan Peninsula and the stains on his face are Pakistan, specifically saying, "Thees birthmark on the right ear is the East Wing; and thees horrible stained left cheek, the West! Remember, stupid boys; Pakistan ees a stain on the face of India!" (294). Saleem does not like his teacher comparing his face to India, even though he draws parallels between his life and India several times. With Saleem, the analogy between his life and India is usually positive or Saleem's actions influence the course of Indian history. In this situation, the comparison is in negative terms; Saleem's face is ugly because it contains the map of India. Also, in this case, Saleem is being influenced by India. The map of India influences how his face looks or at least how others view his face; his face does not affect the map of India. He often feels that it is a blessing that he is connected to India, but in this scene, with the connection being negative, he sees it as a curse (295).

From his second novel, *Midnight's Children*, to a novel written over twenty years later, *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie has used allegory to tell the history of India through his characters. While this form of postcolonial allegory has been well documented by Rushdie critics, I have tried to show that, at another level, characters also allegorize each other and themselves. This allegorical tendency, in many ways, is an offshoot of colonial naming, in that characters erase their own or others' identities in order to gain more power over each other. When this occurs, it prevents moments of healing and reciprocal recognition between characters, and instead leads to continual domination. But also, it prevents the acceptance of polyvocality, or the idea that an independent nation must consist of many different voices. By having his characters flatten each other into

allegorical figures, rather than recognize each other, Rushdie shows the continuing danger of intolerance between communal sects in independent India.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, my goal has been to critique a specific type of verbal language, colonialist discourse, and the practice of labeling that supports this discourse. I am not advocating a binary view of verbal language and body language which privileges the body. Instead, I look at the interplay between verbal and bodily communication, including both the violence of colonial discourse on the body and the ability of the body to narrate its own story as well as to heal. According to Spivak, “To ignore the ‘epistemic violence’ involved in constituting the (post)colonial subject is simply to efface, in a naively utopian way, the long and violence history of the effectiveness of (neo-) colonial power” (Bart Moore-Gilbert 86). The study of colonial discourse is an important tool for understanding the connections between language and colonial power. However, postcolonial scholars should not focus solely on issues of verbal language, especially if solutions to postcolonial problems, such as the alienating effect of labeling, cannot be found in an exploration of the verbal. Diasporic South Asian literature shows us that a possible solution is found in the body. Specifically, these authors show that individuals can be healed from the epistemic violence of colonial domination and its continuing effects through experiencing moments of reciprocal recognition with others.

This is not to imply that physical touch automatically leads to moments of reciprocal recognition. In several of the novels, characters engage in forms of physical contact that do not instigate moments of mutual recognition. This is especially seen in many of the sexual relationships in the novels discussed. For example, Katherine and

Almásy from *The English Patient* and Boonyi and Max and India and Yuvraj from *Shalimar the Clown* form physical relationships that are alienating rather than healing because there is no reciprocal recognition. Neither partner recognize the needs of the other, and so reciprocal recognition does not occur. On the other hand, the novels I have chosen do show moments of reciprocal recognition, when characters appear to gain a voice through touch and body language, and in this way, evade the labels placed upon them by others. For example, Anil in *Anil's Ghost* is able to overcome the alienation she feels and starts to reincorporate her Sri Lankan heritage into her self-identity by experiencing a moment of reciprocal recognition with Ananda. Also, Arjie in *The Funny Boy* is able to gain understanding and acceptance of his ethnic and homosexual identities through engaging in moments of reciprocal recognition through the exchange of body language with other characters. Recognition is a vital component of these exchanges because it allows for an interpersonal transfer of knowledge and a shared understanding.

In contrast, naming is often used as a distancing mechanism in these novels. For instance, Kip from *The English Patient* is nicknamed after a small fish to signify his outcast status in England. In this instance, many of his fellow sappers avoid becoming intimate with him because he is seen as an object of little worth. At the same time, Kip begins to see himself as worthless because of his name. Only when he experiences moments of mutual recognition with Hana and Caravaggio through touch does he realize that others see him as valuable. As Kip realizes this, he is able to see himself as valuable and then to become an acting subject. He is healed from the effects of epistemic violence.

I argue that reciprocal recognition is a counteragent for epistemic violence of colonial or neocolonial naming. Colonialist discourse has been disseminated among postcolonial governments and people that are “officially” independent from Western powers. Further, although the present day effect of colonialist discourse is profound, it is subtle. These factors make it difficult to destroy this discourse because it has become so diffuse. This discourse often sets up “us vs. them” relationships as part of a new postcolonial national identity that still replicates structures of power created under colonization. In many former colonies, the “them” is applied to specific populations such as ethnic minorities, as I discussed in my chapter on *Funny Boy*, where Tamils became the “them.” The “them” is objectified as Other, and hence, violence toward the “them” is legitimized. Violence perpetuates a system of relations and a discourse that leads to more violence and harmful psychological effects.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, only reciprocal recognition, as demonstrated in these novels, provides a model for gaining a shared voice rather than continuing a polarized discourse. The novels show reciprocal recognition to be an effective tool for healing because it often produces systematic changes in how the individual characters relate to each other. In these new systems, individual characters start to relate to each other sympathetically instead of antagonistically. However, it is important to note that the literature I discuss presents reciprocal recognition only as a possibility not as a reality. In fact, while reciprocal recognition is seen as vital in all the novels I discuss, it does not become a reality even in the fictional worlds of some of the novels, specifically in the Rushdie’s works. Even in the novels in which reciprocal recognition does occur, these moments are often fleeting. Moments of reciprocal recognition happen, but not sustained

reciprocal recognition. The authors discussed even have the characters who participate in moments of recognition eventually part ways. The authors show that healing and understanding can happen in the moment of recognition but question whether these moments lead to long term healing and understanding in ways that challenge colonialist discourse.

Even though these authors focus on asking questions and not providing answers, they raise important provocative questions. The characters as they participate in moments of mutual recognition are able to question a neocolonialist discourse that would have the characters objectify each other. The characters are able to wonder if there is a more ethical way of relating to others in which the other is viewed as a subject rather the object. By having their characters ask these questions, the authors are attempting to persuade their readers to ask similar questions.

Along with enticing their readers to question postcolonial naming and to consider how reciprocal recognition could combat the alienating effects of naming, each author also wants his readers to consider additional concerns. Ondaatje wants the reader to rethink their understanding of physical touch and think about the relationship between touch and recognition. Selvadurai wants readers to ask similar questions about body language. He also wants readers to consider how heteronormative masculinity is often encoded in colonialist discourse and the negative effects of continuing to internalize this discourse. Rushdie encapsulates his ideas about recognition in the concept of polyvocality and the importance of allowing others to voice an identity different from one's own. He wants his readers to think about why polyvocality is important, what are

some of forces attempting to destroy polyvocality, such as the impulse to allegorize, and how these forces can be resisted.

Together, these authors force us to question the prevalent focus on the verbal and the pessimism prevalent in much of postcolonial literature and theory. Despite the negative influence of colonialist and neocolonialist discourses, Ondaatje, Selvadurai, and Rushdie illustrate in their fiction the possibility that otherwise antagonistic individuals and groups still retain some agency and avenues for ethical relationships through reciprocal recognition.

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VITA

Scott A. Mitchell was born May 7, 1977 in Provo, Utah. Soon after his birth, he moved to Endicott, New York. He then moved to the Dallas, Texas area where he attended middle school and high school. He has since received a B.A. in English from Brigham Young University (2002), a M.A. from the University of Missouri (2004), and a Ph.D. from the University of Missouri (2010).