

## Resistance or Complicity: An Analysis of Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* as a Postcolonial Text

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**Abstract:** According to Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry and hybridity are subversive strategies applied by colonized subjects to resist colonial domination that emerged as an ambivalent entity in its Janus faced mission of civilization and subjugation. This paper aims to explore the said postcolonial subversive strategies with reference to Micheal Ondaatje's memoir *Running in the Family*. Although Ondaatje's memoir is an emblematic diaspora's personal quest for his roots and identity in pre and post-colonial Sri Lanka, there is enough material in it in the form of characterization as well as direct insights which is open to analysis through a postcolonial lens. Using Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence as theoretical/analytical frame of reference, this article is an attempt to investigate how various fictive characters and their bearings in the selected memoir reflect these concepts: whether they are being used by the characters as resistance against the colonizers' hegemony or are merely being employed as strategies to survive and thrive under colonial rule.

**Key Words:** Resistance, Hybridity, Mimicry, Complicity, Ambivalence, Postcolonial

### Introduction

In postcolonial theory, notions like hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence have been regarded by different postcolonial critics and theorists in two opposing ways: as a servile imitation of the colonizers on the part of the colonized by Franz Fanon (*Brown Skins, White Masks*) on the one hand and as subversive strategies of resistance against the colonizers by Bhabha on the other. Although the central focus of postcolonial writing is to expose and resist the dominance and

hegemony of the colonizers, different postcolonial writers such as Said, Fanon, Spivak, Bhabha, Young and Ahmed have approached the issue from various angles and their insights have broadened and strengthened the postcolonial theory and practice. M.S.Nagarajan effectively concluded the main themes of post-colonialism in the following words "Colonial encounter, and the disintegration of indigenous culture, the journey of Europeans with native guides, colonial oppression, mimicry, exile, disillusionment, cultural

identity, double consciousness, hybridity, unhomeliness and alienation" (190).

Postcolonial theory has been instrumental in exposing the hypocrisy of the colonizers and played a role in the political as well as cultural decolonization of the people of the colonized nations. Although colonialism per se has ended and all the ex-colonies have been able to achieve political freedom to some extent, they are still far from complete cultural decolonization at both individual as well as the collective level, and thus the postcolonial theory still remains relevant. The legacy of colonial encounter and its resultant disintegration of the indigenous cultures has persisted in the liberated countries in disillusionment form, double consciousness, hybridity, and mimicry, resulting in complex identity issues.

Generally speaking, people are said to possess unique personalities, however, their lives are to a large extent governed by the parameters set out by their respective societies. Most people never stop to ponder upon the fact that the sets of principles and values, by which they are living their lives, have been passed down from previous generations because these cultural structures give them the sense of having an anchor. Nevertheless, this sense of stability undergoes an enormous upheaval when, under colonialism, the pressure of change from another dominant culture with a contrasting or opposite set of values is so immense that their once-familiar world disappears. In such situations, the need to adapt to this social change forces people to turn to practices like mimicry, hybridity and double consciousness to bend to the changed way of life. This oftentimes challenging change in life is an aspect that writers can use, and relate to their work.

Authors who choose to pen novels or memoirs have it in their power to endow their characters with diverse personalities, having unique ways to tackle the vagaries of life. These fictive creations behave differently

depending on whether they are being created to live under unfettered conditions or their lives are yoked with colonialism. The reality of the colonized cultures have been under stress from the colonizers' cultures during the Colonial era has been used by the authors like Achebe, Roy, Sidwa, Ondaatje, and others in their works to create characters who have hybrid identities or confront a loss of identity. These works describe colourful characters who come up with various ingenious techniques to cope with problems of life during and after the colonization of their countries. In this research paper, the characters from Canadian based novelist and poet, Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, have been examined to see how and to what purpose they employ the strategies of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence in their lives through and afterwards colonialism. In my reading of the memoir, I have observed a prevalence of the themes of postcolonial cultural ambiguity, hybridity and mimicry not only in the characterization but also in the narration. Although, the postcolonial lens has been used to analyze Ondaatje's memoir by previous researchers, the focus of their research has been on characteristics such as nationality, displacement, and alienation, while ambiguity, hybridity and mimicry have escaped the critical attention of the researchers so far.

## Literature Review

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Michael Ondaatje, a well-known Sri Lankan Canadian author belongs to a hybrid family of Dutch, Tamil and Sinhalese descent and his literary creations are informed by his colonial and diasporic experiences. His book *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), narrates the lived experiences of the South-Eastern Europeans settled in Toronto in the 1930s, and how they contributed to building the modern city. Rich with intertextual suggestions, this narrative becomes the voice of the shadowy people and presents multicultural range of the Canadian society. One of his novels, *The English Patient*

(1992), which won the Booker Prize, imaginatively captures British Empire's disintegration after World War II in its depiction of four randomly assembled characters in an abandoned villa following the Allied march into an Italian land. Both the above-mentioned novels also deal with the concepts of identity, hybridity and mimicry in unique ways. Another famous novel by him, *Anil's Ghost* (2000), takes a penetrating look at the ongoing civil war in the country of his birth, Sri Lanka, and raises issues of identity as Cook posits, this text goes beyond the 'resistance' of postcolonial literature into the region that demands "a theory of process rather than product" (P 2)

*Running in the Family* by Ondaatje, which is the central object of study in this paper, is a memoir written in a postmodernist style that grapples with the questions of identity in Sri Lanka's pre and postcolonial world. Commenting on autobiographical writing in the context of post-colonialism, Gehrman states that such writings have been employed by authors to sort out the subjectivity of their memories in reconstructing their life stories by means of self-focused narrations. These autobiographical narratives may present shared cultural characteristics as well as "the individual as a representative for the communities from which the subject emerges" (923). He adds that the cultural hybridity that marks the postcolonial self does not lead merely to discord, fragmentation or psychological but also brings about rewarding textual parleys to the life story of a self that is inscribed with open and manifold belongings.

Löschnigg observes that, in *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje explores his Sri Lankan roots in an ingenious and vastly idiosyncratic style, by combining anecdotes related to family history and poetic renditions and old family photographs. In his article that explores *Running in the Family* as a postcolonial and postmodernist quest, Leahy

points out that it resists the imperial compulsion of attempting to misrepresent its ideology as impartial and objective while the native as inconsequential in its "subjective blurring and multiplicity of everyday facts and in a consequent re-centering of the local as primary as opposed to peripheral" (p 6).

In their article, "Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* and the "familia-graphic" Gaze", Joseph and Barnwell view Ondaatje as playing the role of a "family history detective" searching for his lineage in a maze of complex Sri Lankan history. Exploring the operation of family memories in conjunction with diasporic imaginings as they emerge "from both the colonial archive and the oral histories of his relatives in Sri Lanka and elsewhere" (p 2), they argue that the memoir's "familia-graphic" gaze demonstrates that even when "proof" of inherited material culture, is tangible and concrete, it retains its ambiguity and remains open to interpretation.

Robert Young assertions that "postcolonial theory is always concerned with the positive and the negative effects of the mixing of peoples and cultures" (Young 69). As this mixing of culture in different ways is the focus of this research, a discussion of Bhabha's ideas on hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and other related concepts forms part of the literature review. It can be argued that Bhabha's work especially his acclaimed book *The Location of Culture* appears as one of the most influential in the postcolonial field in recent years due to its remarkable handling of complex questions such as mimicry, the ambivalent site of colonial enunciation or ambivalence, hybridity, the "time-lag" of culture's liminality, minority agency etc. At the central of Bhabha's critical venture is the strong belief that colonialist discourse, because of its own intrinsic ambivalence and the nature of language as such, had never attained complete discursive domination over the colonised "other". This premise led Bhabha to

reject Said's binary theoretical structures which established that all power lay with the coloniser and to take Said's theory into the realm of the ambivalent (166-189).

Within the ground of postcolonial studies, his reinvigorating of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, and his reconceptualisation of strategies of mimicry within the colonial showground have discovered a new aspect to the colonial relationship. As a cultural theorist, his work has moved towards a theorizing of hybridity which dismantles static views of identity and opens up a new discursive space where subaltern groups can inscribe cultural difference. The clash between the coloniser and the colonized have produced new forms of identity and throughout Bhabha's work there is the constant performance of a theory that discards all essentialist concepts of nation, gender and cultural practice. Bhabha's history of humanity is a hybridist construct relegating all else as myth. According to him hybridity, the third space, or the in-betweenness of culture is not the thin edge of bland multiculturalism which wishes to dictate its cultural hegemony. Rather, Bhabha's work strives towards a new yet non-essential space from where all those previously silenced subaltern groups could speak from. It is for this reason that Bhabha's cultural theories are chosen in relation to the work of Ondaatje as they both lived the postcolonial experience and subsequently migrated to the West. Moreover, both authors have established uniquely singular discourses that borrow from a postmodern consciousness, yet transcend it to produce something new. Additionally, Bhabha's precise theorising of mimicry and hybridity are the most suitable routes to understand the development within Ondaatje's literary representation.

### Theoretical Framework: Colonial Ambivalence, Mimicry and Hybridity

The notion of cultural hybridity refers to the coming together of diverse cultural fragments, including, but not limited to, nationality, language, race, and religion. In Bhabha's work, cultural hybridity refers to the blending of diverse cultural influences, thereby subverting the notion of untainted or authentic cultures. According to him, cultural hybridity poses challenges to cultural hierarchies: "Hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation" (Culture's 34). This challenges Said's classification of cultures of East and West as Bhabha moves outside of cultural binaries and hierarchies with his theory of cultural hybridity.

According to another construction, "hybridity is the essence of the postcolonial self. It is made up of the prodigal and the foreigner in one. In other words, a self, inherited from its history and blood translated into a self-made self. The prodigal son is an apt metaphor for the relativity of the postcolonial point of view" (Ganapathy-Dore 7). Interestingly, postcolonial hybridity in this sense blends the objectivist view of identity with the discursive approach. Bhabha writes that "hybridity' is the double consciousness of the colonized hovering between submission--that is to say, submission to authority but with a difference, submission to authority on one's own terms". In colonial and postcolonial writings, it generally refers to colonial or ex-colonial subjects belonging to Asia or Africa who have been able to find a balance between eastern and western cultural attributes. However, in Bhabha's initial usage of the term, he alludes to its subversive potential as he contends that

“ postcolonial discourse in terms of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking”(Location 265).

Encapsulating his views on mimicry, Bhabha states “The desire to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry– through a process of...repetition–is the final irony of partial representation” (126). Thus, mimicry of Englishness by the colonized is a version having intrinsic variations upon a refrain and not an authentic representation of the original. From this perspective, mimicry becomes the colonizers' instrument in their program of civilizing the natives. The Other is urged by the Other to remain normal by repetition of its actions and conduct. Moreover, the gap between the two must be preserved distinctly, so that the difference remains since the goal is to create “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Location 122) which unsettles both. Bhabha has borrowed his concept of mimicry from Lacan who views mimicry as a defensive measure: “The effect of mimicry is camouflage. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare (qt. in Location 172)”. This shows mimicry not as an act of servile imitation but a strategy of survival in an alien culture.

Ambivalence is defined as a state in which a person is governed by conflicting sentiments and attitudes which result in his embrace or rejection of the colonizer's cultural values. The researcher has used this concept in the current paper to study the characters' confused and ambivalent sentiments and the way in which the author has described them. In *The Location of Culture*, the 'pedagogical' and 'performative' roles of 'the double time' in the postcolonial narrative are elaborated by Bhabha. He

ascribes the pedagogical role to the external impact, while the performative role consists of everyday experiences, the consciousness of memories and images. When these two sides are unable to converge in the matter of identity in the postcolonial state, ambivalence is produced, which is a state of in-betweenness. In this ambivalent state, identity is synchronized out of the existence of contradictory and disparate realities. There is a continual interplay of the opposites in the postcolonial discourse. His investigation, based principally on Lacan's conceptualization of mimicry as a form of mask focuses on colonial ambivalence. In his analysis, the “colonizer appears as a snake in the grass who speaks in a tongue that is *forked*” and produces a mimetic representation that “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Location 122).

Bhabha is aware how colonial power diligently fashions state of the art strategies of control and dominance whereby while cognizant of its transience, it is also keen to craft the means that can warrant its strength in economic, political and cultural arenas, through the formation, in Macaulay's words in his “Minute on Indian Education” (1835), “of a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” – in other words, by the creation of that class of people who Frantz Fanon was referring to in the phrase, “black skin/white masks,” or as “mimic men” by V.S.Naipaul.

## Analysis

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Cross-cultural encounters have come to be a substantial theme within the arena of postcolonial literature and theory. Ondaatje's work has been recognized for the complex charting of postcolonial cultural hybrid experiences. Cultural hybridity, identity and otherness entangled together form a unique

entity. His work represents an intricate thematic connecting of these issues; indeed, they can be understood as central concerns in his work. The experience of hybridity that Ondaatje explore is conflicting in nature and contains inherent tensions. *Running in the Family* is Ondaatje's search for his roots and identity by exploring the history of his family in Sri Lanka through meetings with his surviving relatives and family friends and listening to their stories of the past. The past goes back to the colonial as well as postcolonial times that shaped the personalities, attitudes, and life styles of these people. It is important to note that Ondaatje's ancestors came from a mixed racial background as the first Ondaatje came to Ceylon in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was offered land and a foreign wife because of his successful treatment of the governor's sick daughter. On the maternal side also he seems to have mixed origins as the names Dickman and Gratiaen suggest. They all belonged to an elite class with western education and lived a life of luxury in Ceylonese society. However, in spite of their western education and material well-being, "there was a large social gap between this circle and the Europeans and English who were never part of the Ceylonese community" (Ondaatje 33). This demonstrates Bhahba's argument that although colonizers wanted the natives to get western education and imitate there a way of life, they were not recognized as similar to the white: "the distance between these two is to be maintained distinctly, so as to remain different as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite (Location 122)".

Most of the characters in the memoir exhibit traits of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence at various levels, but in this research I have focused on three characters; the narrator's father Mervyn Ondaatje, his paternal grandfather Philip Ondaatje, and his maternal grandmother Lalla and the narrator himself. Ondaatje claims that Philip was a

man of strict and aloof nature and a lawyer by profession who was successful in amassing great wealth through land deals and retired as he said he would at the age of forty. He wealth enable him to build the family home, "Rock Hill" on a prominent spot of land right in the heart of the town of Kegalle and he lived there for most of his life ignoring everybody in Kegalle social circles who thought were beneath his social status. This attitude earned him the reputation of a snob in Kegalle. He tried to be a loving family man and "The whole family kissed each other goodnight and good morning, a constant tradition in the house". Ondaatje writes ironically that though Bampa (Philip Ondaatje) was determined to be a good father and a patriarch "living in his empire— acres of choice land in the heart of Kegalle" (50) his whole family lived in terror of him. Ondaatje adds that "Like some other Ondaatje's, Bampa had a weakness for pretending to be English and, in his starched collars and grey suits, was determined in his customs" (50). He shares that his elder brother, who was only four years old then, "still remembers painfully strict meals at Rock Hill with Bampa grinding his teeth at one end of the table—as if his carefully built ceremonies were being evaded by a weak-willed family" (50). The narrator's observation that "It was only in the afternoons when, dressed in sarong and vest, he went out for walks over his property (part of a mysterious treatment for diabetes), that he seemed to become a real part of the landscape around him" (50) exposes the unnaturalness of his grandfather's personality when he tries to mimic the lifestyle of the colonizers.

The way Ondaatje describes his grandfather Philip Ondaatje, he appears as a typical example of a mimic man who tries to imitate the colonizers' lifestyle as his starched collars and grey suits and insistence on eating in English style demonstrate. He even avoided the social circle in Kegalle in

imitation of the English who avoided the local community. Ondaatje's use of the word "empire" for his grandfather's large estate also supports the view that he identified with the colonizers. Even his failure to become a good father and patriarch as his whole family used to be in terror of him reflects on the colonial rule which claimed to bring civilization but in reality brought about the subjugation of the natives, thus exemplifying the ambivalence of the colonizers. His character exemplifies the type of colonized subjects Macaulay mentioned they wanted to produce "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". His visiting England every two years to buy new crystal and to learn latest dances suggests that like English he considered England as the mother country that he has to go for pilgrimage regularly. He can be considered a member of the national bourgeoisie who Fanon asserts: "Turns its back more and more on the interior and on the real facts of its underdeveloped country, and tends to look toward the former mother country and foreign capitalists who count on its obliging compliance" (Fanon, 120).

Although, Bhabha does not clearly demarcate how mimicry can play a subversive role in postcolonial discourse yet he often seems to hint at this idea. Perhaps mimicry can rupture the myth of western superiority by showing colonized individuals successfully adapting to the western style of living as Bhabha argues that in the colonial context, "mimicry is firstly the act of repetition itself that actually overwrites the original concept of Englishness". But the cost of this overwriting to the colonized is quite high as he is alienated from his own people and culture. In the character of Philip Ondaatje the use of mimicry does not seem to serve any subversive function against the colonial authorities rather it shows the internalised inferiority complex of the native culture which he wants to shun in favour of

the English culture and thus shows his complicity with the colonial rule rather than resistance. Interestingly the only time he follows his own culture is when he thinks he can somehow cure diabetes by taking a walk in the afternoon in sarong and vest and the narrator remarks that that was the only time "he seemed to become a real part of the landscape around him" hinting that at all other times when he was mimicking English manners he seemed like an alien in his own land.

The narrator's father Mervyn Ondaatje was quite different from his grandfather. Although, he appeared quite anglicised, his personality comes out as more complex and elusive to any straightforward categorization. After finishing school, he was sent to England for higher education, but he was unable to pass the entrance exams. He chose not to tell his parents the truth and led them on that he had been accepted at Queen's college and rented rooms near Cambridge and led an interesting life which included bonding with fellow students, reading novels written by contemporary novelists, going boating, and earning a reputation of a connoisseur who knew the exact worth of what was valuable and interesting in the Cambridge circles of the 1920s. He led a life of luxury, "becoming briefly engaged to a Russian countess, even taking a short trip to Ireland supposedly to fight against the Rebels when the university closed down for its vacation (Ondaatje 22)".

When finally his parent find out the truth and reach England to confront him he surprises them with the announcement of his engagement to an English girl of a respectable family. The narrator writes that "This news stilled most of the fury against him" as his parents were overwhelmed by the English background of his fiancée, but to their disappointment, he broke the engagement on returning to Ceylon and decided to marry Doris Gratian after a short courtship. He also joined the Ceylon Light Infantry though we are told that, the position



he held with the Light Infantry was rather casual- more like a hobby. Giving example of his nonchalant attitude towards his job, Ondaatje narrates,

“Often, in the midst of a party in Colombo, he would suddenly remember he was the duty officer that night and with a car full of men and women planning a midnight swim at Mount Lavinia, he would roll into the barracks, step out in his dress suit, inspect the guard, leap back into the car full of laughing and drunken friends and depart.” (Ondaatje 24)

Although Mervyn's lifestyle shows clear western influence, we are told that “he always claimed to be a Ceylon Tamil” Ondaatje (33) and when his mother in law mentioned his Tamil background he used to feel very proud. All these details about his life reveal him as a cultural hybrid, one who has achieved an equilibrium between the opposing cultural attributes of east and west. However, it appears from Bhabha's essay “Signs Taken for Wonders,” in *Location of Culture* that he initially considered “hybridity as a subversive tool through which colonized people can defy oppression in its various forms”(89). This definition of Bhabha fits Mervyn's character as he did challenge oppression by showing defiance first by breaking off his engagement with an English girl and later on by taking his job with CLI in a most casual manner. He also used his position with CLI to bulldoze his way with railway authorities and used his English mannerism and Cambridge contacts to get duty free alcohol from the ships. His hybrid identity is also revealed through his song which he used to sing when drunk and his preference for a local brand of whisky rather than the English liquors. Ondaatje narrates that his father used to lapse into his songs like improvisations of

“My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean”

“My whiskey comes over the ocean

My brandy comes over the sea

But my beer comes from F.X. Pereira

So F.X. Pereira for me.” (Ondaatje 46)

Unlike his father, Mervyn's mimicry of English mannerism possesses an element of mockery as is obvious from this song and his casual treatment of his duty as a CLI officer can be an example of Bhabha's idea of hybridity as a form of resistance. Unlike his father who had built himself an empire, he gave away parts of that land to many people to build their houses and also donated a large part to a school playground. The mimicry exhibited by Mervyn does not show him to be in awe of the colonizers or made him feel superior to his countrymen as his father did- rather his detachment towards the importance given by his parents towards everything English reveals his latent resentment against the colonizers.

Another character in the memoir who strongly demonstrates hybridity as a subversive tool of resistance is Lalla who was seen at the races with “a large hat at a rakish angle that she wore with no consideration for anyone behind her, one hand on her hip, one hand on her hat, and a blue jacaranda blossom pinned to the shoulder of her dusty black dress” (Ondaatje 43). Peter Barry's statement that: “hybridity /.../ that is the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (for instance, that of the colonizer, through a colonial school system, and that local through oral traditions” (Ondaatje 94) perfectly fits Lalla's personality. Although Lalla enjoyed the westernised culture of the colonial Ceylon, which included drinking, late night partying, gambling, and having romantic extramarital affairs yet she did not use her hybridity to become snobbish like Philip Ondaatje. In fact, she used her emancipated position as a woman to bridge communication gaps with the lower classes. We find that she used to chat comfortably with shopkeepers at the market and on one occasion she went so far as to take a serious risk by hiding her milkman Brumphy who had killed a Scottish man from the police. She



even had to appear in the court when accused of protecting a criminal but she did not give in. Because of her western education and upbringing, she was able to run the dairy business successfully after her husband's death and her hybrid identity facilitated her in negotiating through a patriarchal and colonial world successfully.

Lastly, the narrator, Ondaatje, himself is an example of a hybrid identity, who feels comfortable in both cultures, but his decision to visit Ceylon in search of his roots and identity suggests that in spite of living in the western society he does feel closer to his native culture. Apparently, Ondaatje does not show any trauma of split identity but his justification for why he wants to know all the insignificant details of the private past "I want to sit down with someone and talk with utter directness, want to talk to all the lost history like that deserving lover" ( Ondaatje 47) expresses his nostalgia for his native past. His pride in his native land and his resentment against the western invaders and the writers who wrote derogatively about Ceylonese is expressed in the chapters named "Tabula Asiae" and "Karapothas". Through the very first lines, "On my brother's wall in Toronto are the false maps. Old portraits of Ceylon. The result of sightings, glances from trading vessels, the theories of sextant" (Ondaatje 50) Ondaatje rejects the western depiction of his native country. He goes on to expose the typical mind set of the colonials who were interested in the rich land but found the natives overly inquisitive and uncouth;

The island seduced all of Europe. The Portuguese. The Dutch. The English. And so its name changed, as well as its shape—Serendip, Ratnapida ("island of gems"), Taprobane, Zeloan, Zeilan, Seyllan, Ceilon, and Ceylon—the wife of many marriages, courted by invaders who stepped ashore and claimed everything with the power of their sword or bible or language. (Ondaatje 57)

At another place he states that Ceylon

always attracted too many foreigners who conquered the territory in their obsession for something as slight as the aroma of cinnamon and became wealthy by trading in spices. His pride in his native land becomes apparent when he claims that the Sinhalese alphabet contains the most beautiful symbols or when he refers to the richness of the language "where there are eighteen ways of describing the smell of a durian" (Ondaatje 55). A few lines down after describing the beauty of the land in the tropical monsoon, he writes; "One morning I would wake and just smell things for the whole day, it was so rich I had to select senses" (Ondaatje 55). He is conscious of his hybridity when he exclaims; "I sit in a house on Buller's Road. I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner" (63) exemplifying Ganapathy Dore's statement that "hybridity is the essence of the postcolonial self. It is made up of the prodigal and the foreigner in one" (7). His anger against the invaders is expressed through a mocking statement in which he says that Ceylon was a paradise with a darker side as he elaborates that his ancestor, William Charles Ondaatje, had known about a minimum of fifty-five varieties of poisons readily accessible to his compatriots, but "none of it, it seems, used against the invaders" (Ondaatje 64).

## Conclusion

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The discussion of these three characters and the narrator demonstrates that mimicry and hybridity are fluid concepts and they are employed at various levels by various people for various purposes. For instance, in the case of Phillip Ondaatje it seems that he used mimicry to survive and to achieve success in the colonial environment wherein Memmi's words; "The entire bureaucracy, the entire court system, all industry hears and uses the colonizers' language...make the colonized feel like a foreigner in his own country"(150-151). His use of mimicry makes him a mimic man who gets alienated from his own people

because of his blind following of English mannerism and does not show much subversion other than proving that by following western values a native can gain material success in the colonial world just like an English man. Mervyn and Lalla emerge as cultural hybrids who employ their hybrid identities as tools of subversion: Mervyn breaks off with his English fiancée and makes a mockery of his job with the CLI while Lalla uses her position to protect a native accused of killing a Scot by hiding him from police. In the case of these two characters, it seems they used the mimicry as what Lacan calls a “camouflage... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, of becoming mottled-exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.” (Location 122).

Like Rushdie, Ondaatje has sometimes been condemned for pandering to a wonder-seeking Western readership (Mukherjee

1985), but in this memoir, he appears as a cultural hybrid who uses his position of in-betweenness to criticize the western hegemony in representation and challenges the biased depictions of Ceylon and its people. Although he belonged to an elite class who is accused of showing complicity and ambivalence towards the colonial rule as it suited their privileged position in the colonized society, he has tried to show the arrogance of the English who disdained to mix with the locals, even the ones like the narrator’s grandfather who aspired to be like his colonizer masters, as well the ambivalence of elite classes like his own ancestors who remained passive during the liberation struggles. Over all, it can be concluded that *Running in the Family* demonstrates postcolonial resistance through the narration as well as some of its characters whose colonial ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry were used to subvert colonial domination.

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