"The sentence of history": The Politics of Death and Life-Writing

by

Jose Emmanuel Raymundo
B.A., York University, 2000

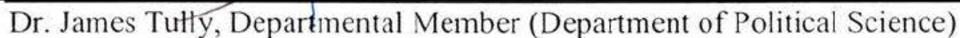
A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Political Science and Cultural, Social and Political Thought

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

Dr. Warren Magnusson, Supervisor (Department of Political Science)



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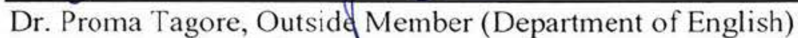

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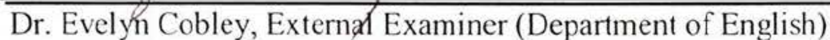

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Supervisor: Dr. Warren Magnusson

ABSTRACT

As illustrated in the essay "The Snake Twins of the Philippines," traditional Western narratives- in political theory, the social sciences and literature- either exclude or exoticize the lives of non-Western, racialized people. Framing the works of Jamaica Kincaid in conjunction with postcolonial and critical race theory, this thesis argues that the genre of life-writing is important for racialized people to challenge racist exclusion and exoticization. Through life-writing, we who have been left out of (or been objectified by) History, can then become fully speaking, thinking and writing subjects who can relay for ourselves our unarticulated (and therefore "unreal") experiences and realities. In so doing, we then confront and challenge racist notions of the static and unchanging "Other" by articulating a dynamic diasporic identity that, in the words of Paul Gilroy, "is always unfinished, always being remade."

Examiners:

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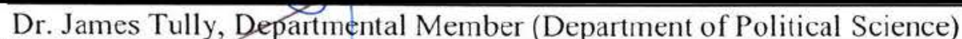

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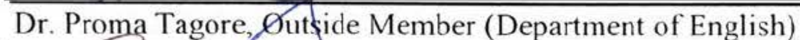

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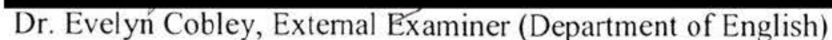

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"I want like hell to tell you. But I can't. I quite literally can't. Because, don't you see, *what I know is what I am.* And I can't tell you that. You have to find it out for yourself. I'm like a book you have to read. A book can't read itself to you. It doesn't even know what it's about. I don't know what I'm about."

-Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man*

"I envy them their public love. I myself have only know it in secret, shared it in secret and longed, aw longed to show it- to be able to say out loud what they have no need to say at all. *That I have loved you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else. That I want you to love me back and show it to me. That I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing you answer- that's the kick.*

But I can't say that aloud; I can't tell anyone that I have been waiting for this all my life and that being chosen to wait is the reason I can. If I were, I'd be able to say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now."

-Toni Morrison, *Jazz*

Chapter 1: *"For those who have been killed"*[1]

I

Do we go into this house?[2]

Whose house is it?

What kind of house is it?

Who lives there?

II

I lived in a house of death. When I think of home, I often think of death. It wasn't always a house of death. One time, it was just an extended and intergenerational household. Along with my mother and father, there was my grandmother, her sister, my grandfather and a revolving door of aunts and uncles and cousins. I have spent countless, pleasurable hours re-playing the days of my childhood and of growing up in the Philippines. I do not know when I will die but I was born on July 4th, 1976 at St. Luke's Hospital in Manila. There are three stories I hear in relation to the circumstances of my birth.

The first story is that my mother was in labour for 36 hours. Going into the hospital on a Friday, I came out of her at 2 o'clock Sunday morning. I had/have a big head. The size of my head, the length of the labour: that is the first story. The second

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[1] This title comes from a photograph of Indonesian performance artist Dadang Christanto's performance piece entitled "For Those Who Have Been Killed", 1993, installation with associated solo performance, suspended bamboo and palm-leaf rib structures, organic materials, Queensland Art Gallery. Photograph courtesy of the artist. See Clarke 1998.

[2] See Appendix

story is that upon sight of me, my grandfather (my mother's father) exclaimed: "Ibalik mo sa mga Amerikano. Hindi puwede sa iyo iyan: masyado ma puti!"[3] Alone in her room, my mother faced the window (I don't know what floor she was on and what view she had nor what the Manila skyline was like then, in 1976, to have a "view" regardless of what room on what floor you occupied, though I often imagine Manila in dusk, bathed in a fiery orange sunset that cast labyrinthine shadows on its large concrete edifices, Imelda's many projects, with no sun in sight)- away from me. This is the third story. Not holding me or touching me, she was reprimanded by the floor nurse: "Hoy! Hawakan mo naman ang anak mo!"[4] When my mother tells me this story, her face turns into a scowl and her voice is terse. There are four stories, actually, now that I am writing and remembering again. In extreme contradiction to what she was like when we were in the hospital- refusing to touch me or to hold me or to even look at me- my mother became very possessive of me when I was brought home: a jealous, killing rage engulfed her when I was cradled by my grandmother.

Along with my birth, a period that is re-told to me, a story that is passed on to me, there are also stories that I own (though I use that term, "own" with great caution especially in relation to "stories"), stories that I remember, stories I tell and re-tell myself because I remember them. They are not told to me; I tell them to myself and I tell them to others, like you. I was there. Asked the other day by a friend "If you could go back in time, what time, any time, would you go back to?" I responded:

1980 My house. With my grandparents and my parents. We had this small porch and it was full of plants- a small banana tree, bougainvilleas that cascaded into the porch

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[3] "Give him back to the Americans. There is no way he can be yours: he's too white!"
[4] "Hey! Hold your son!"

and onto the street they were so large, hibiscus, jasmine, calendulas, ficus, bamboo, a potted banana tree. There was also a wicker bench. I would sit there with my grandmother's sister, my head on her lap; she was the first person to tell me to look up at the sky. I was afraid to look up at the sky. I didn't like how I could tell that the sky moved but when I looked down, the ground was still. It was concrete or paved. It didn't move. But maybe, now I know, but actually back then I knew; that was probably why I was afraid, terrified, because I knew, I knew, that the ground also moved- even if you couldn't see it. Anyway, she told me to look up at the sky and she would point to what the clouds looked like. Spiders, trains, a fishing net with some fish escaping- she said the fisherman was probably so poor he couldn't afford to buy thread to fix the hole in his net (or pay his landlord for the small plot of land on which he built his house and, weighing his options, he figured it would be safer to pay his landlord to make sure he had a home and because even with a small hole, he could still, he hoped, catch some, any, fish to eat and sell at the market and with the money, he could pay his landlord and buy thread to sew back together his imperfect net). Up to that point, I had never played that game before. I was probably four but I never played that game ever before. I would do the rosary with my grandmother and take afternoon naps- the heat was so great there was no choice but to sleep. I would wake up, my grandfather would comb my hair and we'd go for a walk to the bakery, Dimasalang, and buy bread for butter and sugar sandwiches after running into several of my grandfather's friends and former co-workers from Meralco. With my LEGO blocks or my drawing pad, I'd create something for my parents. I loved to design houses, sometimes churches, but mostly houses with enough rooms for all of us- my grandfather, my grandmother, my grandmother's sister, my

mother, myself and my father, and my new baby brother who was red as a prune and never closed his mouth, a house that include a big kitchen and a big living room. My parents would come home, we'd have dinner, there were lots of noise- dishes and forks and spoons and laughing and arguing. I hear the television in the background with pictures of UP students protesting with big red banners shouting things like, Out American Imperialist Pigs.

My strongest and earliest memories involve death. My grandmother's sister, Ate Nita, died in 1980. I was four years old. As dictated by tradition, the viewing of the deceased was done inside the person's home. By and large, and as far as I can remember, funeral parlors- rented and re-used to view the deceased- mostly they did not exist in the Philippines. The dead lay in the home where, in life, they lived. Perhaps this is not just a case of cultural particularity and endemic to the Philippines but was once, rather, the norm. Walter Benjamin writes that

> Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one; think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide open doors of the death house. In the course of modern times dying was has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which someone had not once died. (1955, 94)

Such was the house in which I spent my first years. My Ate Nita's coffin lay where the white vinyl couch was usually positioned: to your left when you entered the door. Just as passers-by on the streets could see the backs of the heads of your guests- during birthday parties, afternoon coffee or evening rosary prayers- passers-by on the streets could see a coffin framed by bouquets of condolence flowers framed by a window.

Superstition dictated that small children be passed over the coffin in order to ensure that ghosts and spirits- of the loved one as well as any others they attracted who

may just have been biding their time at the time of the death or the wake of the loved one did not haunt the family, most of all the members of the family who, on the account of their youth, would be the most sensitive and aware to all presences and disturbances and who, because on the account of their youth, would be the most delightful, or delectable, to ghosts and spirits (depending on their mood, preference of persuasion). And in a country scarred by colonial aggression and foreign occupation, I surmise there would indeed be many ghosts and spirits to attract and not all of them, happy or friendly, indifferent or harmless towards the living- what with the circumstances of their death and, probably, their life as well.

I recalled my brother, who was not even one year old at the time, being passed by my father to my mother over the coffin of a woman whom he did not know and would not get the chance to know.[5] I do no not recall being passed, from anyone's hands, over the coffin of the woman whom I did know and whose own lap my own head had laid, the same head that wondered then, "who, now, will tell me stories?" and "what ever really happened to that poor fisherman with the tattered net?"

Perhaps, because I was never passed over the coffin, I am haunted by the dead and pre-occupied with their legacy- namely, memory and history. Regardless, from that moment on, once the wake was finished and my Ate Nita buried, I was never able to sit

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[5] An actual funeral as either a first or significant memory of death is an experience shared by others. Performance artist and Columbia University professor Coco Fusco relays us a similar story about death and childhood. "Having been raised as a Catholic," she writes "I knew first hand about the drama of open-casket funerals, round-the-clock wakes, and cycles of recited prayers that went on for days and days. I knew that physical contact with the dead triggered something very powerful in people's minds. I could vividly recall the combination of terror and fascination that I felt as a child when I would be led up to the body of someone I had known but was suddenly too afraid to touch, as if death were an illness I might contract." (2001, 22) Vancouver-based mixed-media artist Daniel Olson writes the following: "My mother, who had been diagnosed with cancer four years earlier, died…A few days later at the funeral home I stood in front of the open casket with a cousin my age. I don't remember whose initiative it was, but, on some kind of dare, we both approached the coffin and touched her face, and our morbid curiosity was satisfied to feel that her skin was cold." (Olson 2001, 14)

on that white vinyl couch with its custom fitted yellow throw neatly pulled and tightly tucked over it and put back where her casket once stood. The house, and that room, was always and forever a space that housed death.

My second memory of death came closely after my Ate Nita's death. One day, in kindergarten, as part of a science experiment, with the aim of showing us how things grow, we planted bean sprouts in white, Styrofoam cups. We were to take these cups of seeds and soil, water them taking care to ensure we gave the soil only enough water it could absorb so as to not flood the cup and drown the seeds, and place them in a dark, cool place. And we were supposed to wait.

At home, my grandfather suggested the best place for them would be under the wicker couch on the front porch in front of our home. Protected from the sun by a wood awning, the seed, he said, would sprout. And it did. The next night, while everyone was gathered around the dinner table, over the clatter of plates and dishes and the sounds of protests and uprisings blared through the television (and the government's successful attempt to quell such protests and uprisings and restore peace), I went outside to check my styrofoam cup. I peeked under the wicker chair. The small pale green coloured beans I planted in the styrofoam cup had risen above the dark soil in a stem of translucent green curls and a pale white, oval shaped seed that looked like a smaller version of the seed I buried into the soil only the day before.

My amazement soon turned to confusion. Two days later, after the translucent green stem turned into a deep green and the pale, white oval shaped seed that looked like a smaller version of the seed I buried into the soil only the day before grew larger to the point that it looked like the very seed I buried into the sail only the day before, my plant

died. Peeking from the brim of the Styrofoam cup then shooting past it, the plant, on the second day, died and languished limp over the brim of the Styrofoam cup. The seed had grown and outgrown the Styrofoam cup. In showing us how things grow, I learned how things end. The living, eventually, die.

As plants wither and die, a third instant of death so strongly burnished in my mind is the memory of the decline my grandparents. The quiet decline of my grandparents occurred shortly after my parents left for America- for good. From what I remember, there were only short instances when both my parents were in the Philippines at the same time. My mother and father met, my mother tells me, in Japan at Yazaki Torres Manufacturing Inc. "Established in September 1973 as a joint venture with F. L. Torres, Yazaki-Torres Manufacturing makes wiring harnesses, automobile instruments, battery cables and other automotive parts. The company promotes employment in the Philippines and contributes to the country's exports of industrial goods."

My grandfather, I remember, like many Filipinos of his generation, would take exception to the company's claim (made by many other companies)- that they "promote employment in the Philippines and contribute to the country's exports of industrial goods." My grandfather, I remember, argued that the Japanese- colonial occupiers of the Philippines during World War II- never properly repaid the Philippines for destroying the economic (not to mention the social) infrastructure of the Philippines. Yazaki Torres, established in 1973, was apparently borne out of the myriad of formal and informal agreements between the Japanese and the Filipino government to pay the Philippines for war damages. As novelist F. Sionil Jose argues, it is disingenuous for Japan to count overdue and outstanding war reparations as part of its foreign aid contribution to the

Philippines. Rightly so, war reparations and foreign aid are completely different things. Reparations for deliberate damages inflicted during a war are not the same thing as foreign aid contributed to a country because of its desperate conditions (which, thanks to the circling orb and indiscrete and non-discriminatory tendency of history, is traceable in large part to war and its insidious offsprings).

Regardless, my parents met through this company. My father, an electrical engineer who was always handy with small tools, taking things apart and putting them back together like they were never taken apart and my mother, a high school biology teacher, were hired to learn how to make those "wiring harnesses, automobile instruments, battery cables and other automotive parts." While I still don't ever really know what my father did for a living, I know that, at one point, he travelled back and forth between Manila and Tokyo. Perhaps, I will concede, he did not travel that much at all and my recollection of the frequency of his travels is such only because in the mind of a small child who has only lived a short while, absences, however prolonged or however brief, nonetheless assumes a deeper presence.

My mother left the Philippines after being a high school biology teacher and then a City Hall Administrator (which she says was her favourite job: she had so many friends and they had so much fun). She left the Philippines (via Guam, to buy spare car parts for her uncle's business) to San Francisco (where she worked as a housekeeper and where she was always bothered by the quick changes in the weather, sometimes sunny then rainy and then cold and then, of course, fog) to Washington D.C. (where she worked in the Saudi Arabian embassy and served tea and small slices of cake to the wife of the Ambassador whom she called "Madame" and to her friends, whom she also called

"Madame" and then) for New York (Jersey City actually, across the river) to work as a Nurse's Aide, an Avon cosmetics sales lady and a housekeeper (amongst many other things). First my mother left and then she sent for my father.

The house in which I grew up, full of noise and familiarity, changed. We were evicted from that house. Apparently, while my grandmother's family had lived in that house since 1911 they, for one reason or another, never bought the land (and neither did my grandfather once he married my grandmother and moved into her house nor my parents when they got married and moved into their house) but instead only continued to rent from the man who actually did own it. One day, after more than 73 years, the man who inherited the land from his father, refused to rent the land upon which our house stood. After some trips to a lawyer (an older, round shaped man who had a very young and very porcelain-skinned and very, very pregnant wife), we (first my grandmother, father, grandfather, myself and my younger brother) had to move. One day, my grandfather, in great haste, packed a few things- t-shirts, underwear pants, television (he could not miss his Monday night boxing) and the radio (my grandmother, he knew, could not miss her afternoon radio dramas). We left our home. (Months later we returned inside and gathered what was not broken, damp or wet or what we really missed and wanted; two years later, meeting some neighbourhood kids I never knew before, who broke in through the boarded up kitchen back-window, I stood in the old house, in my old home, with the support beams now exposed, devoured by termites and shafts of clear afternoon light streaming in from the holes and cracks in the ceiling. No one knew I lived there before.)

We moved down the street into my grandfather's house that he did, apparently, really own- the land, the house built upon it, and the doors and windows making up the house- next to a larger house filled with brothers and sisters and their children- people I never knew existed but who lived down the street. In that house, that would never be quite my home, we (my grandfather, grandmother and myself) lived with my grandfather's sister's daughter and her family- two boys (12 and 14) and husband (who was soon moving to California he had just gotten a job). My father's brother took my brother. Along with his own children, he would raise my brother (whom I would not ever really get to know).

In a new house, with new people, without my parents, things only continued to change. My grandparents started to decline and became vulnerable to sickness and, I am sure, sadness. Afternoon naps became longer, days became shorter; there was no porch to sit on to look up at the sky and make stories up about fishermen and their tattered nets or anything else for that matter. Cataracts clouded my grandmother's eyes. My grandfather was plagued with headaches and migraines so bad he could no longer walk nor sit for very long though he would try to watch Monday night boxing, his favourite, and their afternoon re-broadcast. On good days, he would shower and, freshly washed, he would sit in the darkened, cool living room and I would see his face lit by the glow of the television. He was so handsome in this light and he would smile at me and motion me to sit next to him and I would fall asleep with my head on his lap while he shadowboxed the jabs and punches, the ducks, of the boxers on screen. On bad days, he would stare at the television and fall asleep. I would stay away and do something else.

As my grandparents declined into illness, I now gather, so did their friends. The quietness, silence and slowness their condition demanded was afforded by the fact that their friends were in similar states of illness and decline. Even then, I wondered, where will they place the casket for the viewing? Who will come to watch and look and view the deceased? Their friends, chatty and curious women with hair pinned in neat buns and men with always fresh haircuts and loud, confident laughs, stopped dropping by and stopped visiting. My mother and father were in America living some life I did not think much about other than they were in America. The only time I would see children I once played with in our old home would be at church and very often, funerals, where we would hear about how their parents, too, are in America living some sort of life that, I imagined, they did not at all think much about other than they were in America and that they were not here. They were gone. Where, then, I wondered, will the casket be placed so that passers-by on the streets could see a coffin framed by bouquets of condolence flowers framed by a window since there was no big and open window in this new house behind a large, old house filled with people I did not know and never knew existed, since the events of this house happened away from public view to either invoke sympathy or, at the very least, arouse suspicion and curiosity.

The final understanding of death which has altered and shaped my world view occurred in America- that place seemingly from without, where people disappeared to, and (at least in the Philippines) returned with boxes crammed with coffee, shampoo and chocolates. As my mother had sent for my father, they had sent for my brother and me. They- my mother, father and a newborn and unseen baby brother who was born in America- awaited our arrival. Who knows, though, what happens to people when they

get to America and their big dreams and big plans for America were not at all what they imagined it would be when they lined up at the American Embassy on Roxas Boulevard for their visas and work permits, hoping the line would move, just so, in their favour so that they would be parked under the giant balete tree when the afternoon sun peaked, smiling at the incorruptible security guards (they were American trained and employed by the Embassy) with 50 peso bills.

We lived in an office converted into a tenement-apartment in Jersey City, a building owned by a very wealthy Filipino businessman who drove a Porsche. I sometimes think of this landlord and wonder how he could, in all good conscience, rent a mice-and-cockroach-infested tenement to a young family? Then I answer my question by thinking he was only doing what people are supposed to do in America. You make it and you don't look back; you don't worry about the details or who's living the details- like no heat, lead paint cracking and chipping from the drafty windowpanes, mice and cockroaches. My father, an electrical engineer in the Philippines, worked as the driver for the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the UN. My mother, a high school biology teacher in the Philippines worked the graveyard shift as a Nurse's Aide at Mother Cabrini Hospital and cleaned apartments up and down Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue and vacuumed and cleaned toilets from Tenafly, New Jersey to Greenwich, Connecticut.

Never seeing each other because of work, the jealousy of my father- a possessive man, an envious and jealous man by nature- was fueled. After secretly taping the phone conversations of my mother (with the help of the wealthy landlord who was a terrible womanizer with a trail of illegitimate children from Manila to Tokyo, San Diego to Rock Cliff, New Jersey, and whose advances, I suspect, my mother spurned and rejected), my

father concluded my mother was having an affair with a Mercedez-Benz car salesman- a family friend no less. My father, the driver for the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the UN, who spent countless hours driving a car and numerous other hours washing, waxing and polishing the car, but did not have his own car and could not afford his own car (to take his family to the park in Bayonne or for a stroll on the boardwalk in Atlantic City or to quell the apparent desire of his wife for shiny cars and the men who hawked them).

One November night, as I was doing my math homework in front of the television in their bedroom, I heard cries and yells. My father, enraged, was stomping my mother's head into one of the file cabinets left by the previous tenants. My father, a short and squat man with thick legs and forearms, was kicking and punching my mother who was crumpled limp into a corner shrieking and crying, "Stop." But my father did not stop. My brother and I covered my mother with our own bodies as my American-born, new baby brother, now a toddler, shrieked in another corner of the room with a cotton t-shirt soaked wet with spit and tears and a diaper drenched thick and heavy with yellow.

Many things died that day. The marriage of my mother and father would not survive. I wondered for days if my mother would survive: she was so broken and crumpled. My father, an electrical engineer who was always handy with small tools, taking things apart and putting them back together like they were never taken apart, broke his marriage and his life when he broke his own wife's face. While he broke it and took it apart with his own bare hands, it was the one thing he could not ever put back together with his own hands no matter how good he was at putting back together things like they were never taken apart.

And now, it is my hands that wrote these things and put it back together. And I will take it apart again and put it back together and maybe it will never fit together like it was, when it was new or not broken or never used. It has to be done. We must all find something to do with our hands. In mourning and in death, as in life, there is always work to be done.

Chapter 2: Surviving Stories

I

And there are many other stories like these. The point remains that as a single man living on my own, pursuing graduate studies on the West Coast, where I do not have one bloodfamily member- but instead pieces of family spread across from Toronto to Chicago to Colorado to Manila and friends I have made and designed to be a family- I often tell and re-tell these stories, sometimes to myself, oftentimes to my friends and yet still, at other times, to any patient, or available, audience. In so doing, I've often wondered: What purposes do telling these stories serve? And I am compelled to tell them.

Instead of receding into the shadowy and hazy background usually reserved for artifacts, these stories- the images, the details- have brightened and sharpened illuminating the tasks and chores, the work, of my everyday reality and my present life. These stories- telling them and re-telling them, remembering them- have taken on a more immediate sense of urgency as I get older and as I move away from the time and place these stories were supposed to have happened. Thinking about my stories, my memories and my rememberings, I am comforted and I am challenged to action to remember by the words bell hooks often repeats in her essays, words from the *South African Freedom Charter*: "the struggle is of memory against forgetting." From deep within me, crackling to the surface, there is an urgency to remember and not to forget.

This project is relevant to political theory because it is an attempt to intervene in the dominant narrative of traditional, Western political theory. A particular narrative

about what it means to be human is implicit in Western social science, Western political theory and Western literature. I use the term "Western" to denote the cultures of Europe that, historically, have accumulated a tradition of empire, conquest and imperialism. Furthermore, I use the term "Western" to denote the dominant and normative framework of the contemporary North American, "first world," and Canadian context from which I am writing. Within this framework, particular notions of human nature, rationality and individuality are prejudiced in that they take the experiences, histories, needs, interests, values and preoccupations of the white, European male (which is, also, a heterogeneous category) as universal and equally applicable to all peoples. The assumption that the information "we" have established is applicable to everyone is incorrect. Hazel Carby argues that

> We need to recognize that we live in a society in which systems of domination and subordination are structured through processes of racialization that continuously interact with all other forms of socialization. Theoretically, we should be arguing that everyone in this social order has been constructed in our political imagination as a racialized subject. In this sense, it is important to think about our invention of the category of whiteness as well as of blackness and, consequently, to make visible what is rendered invisible when viewed as the normative state of existence: specifically the white point in space from which we tend to identify difference. (1999, 250)

The continued reliance on a "universal" man- with a corresponding set of needs, wants, values and principles- is simply inadequate. To continue relying on the notion of a "universal man" is to render useless the urgent necessity to think more seriously about the variety of different human experiences. An important beginning for intervening in this dominant narrative is to bring to the fore the experiences of racialized peoples. I use the term "racialization" to refer to the structures, process and exertion of power that results in "race" and, furthermore, the process by which "race" assumes a certain valence of either privilege or inferiority. Concomitantly, I use the term "race" to denote the people who

are marked as different and as the "Other" by physical characteristics, such as skin colour, and through other categories- such as ethnicity and culture.

The task of articulating the experiences of racialized people is difficult. Racialized people have been relegated to the margins of History. The task, then, of drawing observations, findings and conclusions from that same History can be futile since it neglected to include the experiences and histories of racialized peoples from the outset. The challenge associated with the absence of a body of work from which to draw observations, findings and conclusions- and thus establish "evidence" for our experiences and our realities- is expressed by Jamaican sociologist and novelist Erna Brodber who writes that

> To be addressed as a writer, as an artist, still seems strange to me because despite *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* and *Myal* I still think of myself as a sociologist and my fiction writing as a part of my sociological method. My sociological effort and therefore the fiction that serves it, unlike mainstream sociology, has activist intentions: it is about studying the behaviour of and transmitting these findings to the children of the people who were put on ships on the African beaches and woke up from this nightmare to find themselves on the shores of the New World. It is my hope that this information will be a tool with which the black and particularly those of the diaspora will forge a closer unity and, thus fused, be able to face the rest of the world more confidently. (19xx, 164)

Lacking a body of work from which to draw evidence, lacking evidence from which to create more work, racialized people, sometimes have to make it up. We have to make things up.

For the longest time, I could not write this thesis and even when I did start writing and I submitted chapters to my committee, I could not continue with others. Some chapters were easier to write than others. At one point, I thought to myself, "this isn't academic enough, this isn't theory enough, there aren't enough ideas gleaned and cited from books…" I started writing again once I got over that. Walter Benjamin suggested

that "Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn." (1955, 91) Why, then, can I not begin with my own story? I should indeed be able to.

My ability to tell my story in definite relation to theorizing about the lives and experiences of racialized peoples is no doubt influenced by certain kinds of prejudices, however unexamined, which insidiously inhibit the ability of racialized people to think, write and speak. There is, on the one hand, a certain kind of academic elitism that self-appoints as its mandate the active policing of academic borders embodied through what books are read, which theorists are referred to and cited and which particular writers are discussed. Academic elitism- doing double duty also as racism- is present when it then renders pointless having racialized people speak because our experiences, in all their range and diversity, are not seemingly verifiable. The question must be asked: to whom are we speaking?

I now turn to the words of Jamaica Kincaid. Kincaid is astutely aware of the politics framing the encounter between the writer and the reader.

> ...if there is anything different about me, it is that I do not have to, or want to please an English audience, or an English colonial audience. I think the major thing for me was that I came to America: and not England, or Canada; and that it was not required of me to behave in some way. When you are in America, you can invent yourself. I was able to figure out a voice for myself that had nothing to do with where I went to school, or with what I was born to, or where I came from. (In Birbalsingh 1996, 139)

From my standpoint and from my particular circumstance, I am, unlike Kincaid, indeed writing for a specific audience. This presents some challenges to my situation. Who exactly is the reader, who is the audience, of this work? Immediately, the audience will be a mostly white thesis committee in a mostly white university. (And in the larger context of things, I am writing, for better or for worse, in Canada and not the "America"

Kincaid writes about where you are "not required to behave in some way" and "where you can figure out a voice for (yourself).")

How to approach the site of dialogue is an important challenge for racialized people. The matter is simultaneously one of structure and agency. On the one hand, how do racialized people voice our concerns through existing and established institutional structures- whether they be Western social science, political theory and literature, the academy or official "History"- which have ignored and erased our existence (other than as exoticized "others" and as appendages to the sanctioned subjects and actors of the official narrative)? Concomitantly, how do we exercise our ability to think, speak and participate on our own behalf? In other words, how do we express our political agency insofar as we can substantively contribute to changes and improvements in our lives- within the very institutional structures that have erased us? The primary challenge for racialized peoples is to convince ourselves we have something to say and that what we have to say matters. One of the most damaging things we can do, as bell hooks suggests, is to internalize racist-ideology, self-censor and thus collude with the very racist ideology that conditions us to believe we have nothing to say. (hooks 1992)

And we do have something to say. I have something to say. While this work may be of limited consequence to the field of political science (though again: what kind of political science? What kind of politics?), it may be of more consequence to others. Its impact and importance, let alone it's "validity" to make it to the committee level, for example, depends much more on who's reading it and who's giving it meaning and who's extracting whatever ideas and experiences they (that imagined community of readers) choose to.

Jamaica Kincaid writes about her apprenticeship with a seamstress:

> 'Miss Doreen can take you now.' Miss Doreen was a seamstress. She wasn't my seamstress and she wasn't my mother's seamstress...What my mother meant by her taking me now was that I could begin to be her new apprentice. We lived on a small island in the Caribbean, and everyone I knew then was apprenticing to someone...At the time I began with Miss Doreen, I already knew how to sew on a button, and how to sew two things together, using a simple in-and-out stitch. But that made no difference to her. This is what she had me do: for the first few months, at the end of every sewing day, it was my job to sweep up the floors, which were always covered with threads and scraps of cloth; I dusted her sewing machine; and at the end of every week I polished its mahogany cabinet. It was almost a year before I could tie off the ends of threads on the wrong side of a dress, and then only if it was a child's everyday dress. It was years before I was allowed to go the store with a sample of cloth and buy the matching-color thread for it. I was fourteen years old before I was asked to hem a woman's Sunday dress. (2001, 220-221)

My experiences in political science have been very much like an apprenticeship for which, admittedly, I eagerly volunteered. At the same time, I now wonder with increasing anticipation and anxiety, when this apprenticeship will end. Thinking about how I came to political science, I recall that while I was always interested in politics, human affairs and current events, I never daydreamed about being a politician or a bureaucrat (the things that most people, including myself, expect you to do with a degree in political science) with the same sense of play and pleasure as I did when I dreamed about being, amongst other things, a pilot, a priest, a dress designer or a playwright and novelist. Rather, I entered political science out of fear.

As a child of working-class, Filipino immigrants, I knew that I had to train for something that would get me a job that didn't involve cleaning apartments or driving cars as my parents had to do when they immigrated from the Philippines. At the same time that it was inculcated in me that honest work- like cleaning apartments and driving cars- was the most important thing, I was simultaneously ingrained with the impression that my parents were cleaning apartments and driving cars precisely so I did not have to. Or

perhaps, rather, so that I would have a "choice." At the end of my first year as an undergraduate, I had to declare a major. I applied to two specialized programs- Public Policy and Administration and Creative Writing. I was accepted into both. I chose political science out of fear.

Despite entering political science out of fear, I thought I could, at the very least, learn about myself and my history. However, in between the courses in international relations, public policy, comparative politics and even political theory (which once excited me for its promise of thinking and playing with ideas and, however doe-eyed and utopian, "imagining the possible"), I wondered: Where am I? As a transplanted Filipino-Canadian, as a gay man, where are my experiences? Where is my story? The discipline of political science has been my "home" for my entire formal undergraduate and graduate education. In the classroom, talking about books and ideas, invoking the spirit of the more often than not dead, I often feel invisible- and I am alive. Only talking about the dead, slowing your own pulse and waiting to die (so, I guess, my experiences and my histories can be talked about, though when I am dead who will/how can anyone speak for me?) is no way to be, is now way to live, in your own "home" now is it?

While acknowledging that every discipline has certain established boundaries, I am pressed to ask the implications for enforcing these certain established boundaries upon certain people; for example, for racialized people? When do I get to speak in my own voice or a voice resembling my own? When do I get to speak to the audience with whom I want to speak? While useful in its own way, an apprenticeship, I do not think, should forestall one's opportunity to make his own work and make his own labour.

Much is lost in the waiting; too much is lost in the waiting; I have lost too much in the waiting.

I vacillated between including and omitting the autobiographical portions from this thesis. I acknowledge that certain readers and certain audiences may contest revealing highly personal (to them) information about myself; revealing information alone does not constitute a thesis. And I would agree. But that is only a part of my work and my narrative. Including autobiographical information addresses several important issues raised in this thesis, the academic integrity of this work and my implacable belief that the political is indeed personal and the circumstances of my graduate work. We should be very cautious towards dismissing certain forms of scholarship like work that includes autobiographical information. Furthermore, we should, I suggest, be very cautious towards pushing certain materials and texts as "fiction." To constantly push certain materials as "fiction" and label it as “outside” the borders of a discipline, may very well be a strategy to defer engaging with the issues and concerns those works raise because it, arbitrarily and conveniently, falls outside the scope and purview of the discipline. When what is pushed away to fiction and literature are the experiences of racialized people, we must continue to be cautious for this tendency may indeed be a strategy to defer and disengage, censor and police, the issues and concerns these works raise- and the people who write are writing them.

I am also aware that I could very well have included the autobiographical sections as an appendix after the formal (or "real") thesis. I consciously decided against that. To put the experiences I have recounted and recalled which have laid the groundwork for the theoretical concepts I discuss (and which provide support and illustration for one

another) as an appendix is to make the work incomplete precisely because both are parts of one whole. Furthermore, to separate the "personal" from the "political" is to assume that knowledge is discrete and compartmentalized. Furthermore, to induce and insist such a false separation is to remain ignorant of the lives of racialized people where the boundaries between the personal and the political have long been unclear or altogether erased.

I am aware of both the fascination and repulsion (and, yes, the indifference) this work may inspire. To begin with, I am conscious of "the emotional striptease," as Coco Fusco has expressed, "that white audiences so often demand." (2001, xiv) Furthermore, I am conscious of the tendency for these stories to be read in an Orientalist fashion and taking what I am saying as "cultural truths" or anthropological case studies about "life in the Philippines." Rather, institutions such as family home, "home," race, gender and sexuality (which includes such things as domestic violence, shifting family structures and patterns of immigration) are constitutive of colonial and postcolonial histories. Factoring in issues like colonization and in the context of a race-supremacist society, the childhood and lives of racialized people who are racially marked as "Other" and different from the dominant and hegemonic classes, are thereby even more unnoticed and unwitnessed by the larger society. Attention to the lives of these subjects often comes from within the private realm of family, friends and one's self. In relation to her body of work and their reflections on her childhood, performance artist and Columbia University professor Coco Fusco reasons that she turns to childhood memories because they "represent my personal link to a very political history of colonialism, and that history has shaped a very specific relationship between mind and body for colonized and

enslaved peoples and their descendants." The things I write and speak about are not "natural" phenomena endemic to Filipinos or Filipino culture (in the Philippines or in the diaspora) but are rather experiences that have been in part constructed out of a history of, and experiences from, colonialism and postcolonialism.

Take for example the issue of sex and violence inside the home- often regarded as a private entity. Indeed, the violence occurring inside the home may be private in that it is committed outside the symbolic purview of others and outside the domain of the public sphere. If victimage occurs privately, recovery from violence and trauma cannot be reasonably expected to be addressed and ameliorated exclusively in the private sphere- or the same sphere in which violence was perpetrated. Rather it is through both private acts of reflection and public dialogue which functions as a means to "make real" and visible what was rendered "not real" and invisible can resolution occur.

To the extent that the West has taken into account the lives and experiences of the non-Western, racialized person in Western social science, political theory and literature, it has usually been in a manner that exoticizes the non-Western individual while contributing to the established tendency to aberrantly lump all non-Western peoples into one category. To illustrate this tendency, in the third chapter entitled "The Snake Twins of the Philippines," I will examine an article by a German missionary pastor and anthropologist about the phenomenon of some Filipino women giving birth to twins- one human and one snake. To a naturalized Canadian of Filipino immigrants, to a person such as myself, this article is especially provocative and troubling. Is this kind of narrative that exoticizes Filipinos (and racialized subjects) atypical? Or is this example in keeping with the tradition of dominant Western narratives that both ignores the

experiences of non-Western peoples and, when it does pay attention to these experiences, does so in a manner that supports exoticization? Most importantly, I am challenged to think about the strategies and methods through which a racialized person can effectively disrupt and combat such a narrative that casts doubts on and raises speculations about the literal origins and humanity of racialized peoples.

Within traditional Western narratives- including the social sciences, political theory and literature- there are established practices of representation. On the one hand, for example, there are quantitative measurements, such as statistics, used to represent objects and ideas. These mathematical representations are created for the purpose of facilitating comparisons. From such comparison, action can then be mobilized, for example, in the form of public policy favouring one method of addressing an issue over another. Aside from mathematical representations, there are also, on the other hand, qualitative measurements. Such measurements can take the form, for example, of journalistic narratives such as "human interest" stories or case studies.

Viewed in the context of a racialized social system, these established modes and practices of representation are simultaneously inappropriate and inadequate. They are inappropriate insofar that the subjects of these stories are not telling their stories for themselves; rather, their stories are being told by others. The subjects of these stories, then, become objects in the process of narration and storytelling. Furthermore, these narratives of representation are inadequate because they preserve a certain kind of relationship between the West and its racialized "Other." In effect, the "other" does not speak but is only spoken to as it is observed and beheld under the Western gaze.

The question, then, is to determine other modes and practices of representation. Towards this goal, I turn to the genre of autobiography and life-writing, or personal narratives, in the fourth chapter entitled "*'The sentence of history'*: Jamaica Kincaid and the Politics of Life-Writing," as illustrated through the writings of Antiguan-American novelist and Harvard University professor Jamaica Kincaid. Relying on examples from Kincaid's stories to illustrate the significance of writing about our lives for racialized people, the first portion of this chapter relies on examining the autobiography. Present in autobiography is

> …a sense that something empirically real is being imitated, something that has an existence outside of or prior to the text; thus while theoretically all art is mimetic, in drama and life-writing mimesis is a necessary condition; in both cases, art is less an end in itself and more a means of reproduction; what we take pleasure in is the mimetic impulse itself, while in some strange way, what we also delight in is the fact that what is imitated- basically "life"- can never be fully appropriated or superseded by the copy. (Hinz 1987, vii)

Hinz argues that the autobiography is a "closed" form offering proof in that "we are hesitant to accord authority to biographies of the living and why on-going diaries are less successful than autobiographies, as well as why the success of the latter requires a certain amount of distance or distinctness between the period described and the vantage point of the writing." (1987, ix) Making a distinction between autobiography and life-writing, I suggest that life-writing is ultimately more useful for racialized people because it is an "open" form that both welcomes and requires observing, reflecting and recording life without the finality of autobiography and the temporal length of Time and History an autobiography requires.

Life-writing is one important way that concretizes postcolonial theory's desire to, as Homi Bhabha so forcefully and eloquently stated, "intervene in (the) ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic "normality" to the uneven

development and the differential, often disadvantaged histories of nations, races, communities and peoples" and thus "explore those social pathologies- 'loss of meaning', conditions of anomie- that no longer simply cluster around class antagonism, (but) break up into widely scattered historical contingencies." (1994, 171) Through life-writing, those who have been left out of (or been objectified by) History, can then become fully speaking, thinking and writing subjects who can relay for ourselves our unarticulated (and therefore "unreal") experiences and realities. In so doing, we then confront and challenge racist notions of the static and unchanging "Other" by articulating a dynamic and diasporic identity that, in the words of Paul Gilroy, "is always unfinished, always being remade."

II

So now it has been eleven years since I saw my father last, yet I know we have met in a space of death. When I returned to the Philippines, I visited my grandfather's grave often. Victim to the neglect of nearby family members who don't pay nearly enough attention to the dead (which is as well since they paid no attention to them when they were alive) and ravaged by sun and rain, I made it my job to clean my grandfather's cemetery plot. In death, as in life, my grandfather would have one of the things he most prized: a clean home. I bought large hedge clippers to cut the weeds that sprouted from cracks in the cement ground and bought a shovel. I don't know why other than I thought I needed a shovel but soon found out that the hedge clippers were much more useful than

the shovel which I did not use at all. To be precise, my hands were enough. I could pull the weeds that were only weakly anchored to the ground with my own hands.

Recently, I heard that my father- himself not having been to the Philippines, apparently, in ten years, since the funeral of his father- returned to the Philippines. I wonder if he went to his father's grave. I wonder if he made it his job to clean the cemetery plot, for like his father and like me, he prized a clean home. I wonder if he bought large hedge clippers to cut the weeds that sprouted from cracks in the cement ground and I wonder if he, too, was compelled to buy a shovel thinking it would be of use only to find it useless? I wonder if he thought about me cleaning his father's cemetery plot as I am wondering if he cleaned his father's? I wonder if he wondered at all if he will have a grandson to clean his cemetery plot like his son cleaned his father's? I wonder if he thinks about his son or his son having sons or if he thinks about death? His. I wonder.

I wonder if this irony occurred to him, as he cleaned (if he cleaned) his father's cemetery plot, as it occurred to me when I was cleaning the cemetery plot? His father bought a cemetery plot that now houses his bones and the bones of his wife, her sister and their parents but he did not, despite living there for more than fifty years, buy the plot of land upon which his house stood. He would have a home in death but his claim to a home in life was less certain. Especially in a small country, made even smaller because there are so many people, his cemetery plot is considerable in size. It is large enough for a home. It is probably the size of the plot of the land upon which the house I first lived in was built so much so that his relatives told me "It is a big plot" and "It is a nice plot" and "Like the rich Chinese, a roof should cover it and gates should be erected." When they

were saying this, I thought, I am not like the rich Chinese. I am not rich nor am I Chinese. When they were saying this, I wondered if they were making plans to request to be buried there when they died? I wondered how my grandfather would feel sharing his resting place with people who barely spoke to him when he was alive? It probably would not bother him. I wondered if my grandfather would be crowded out, if he would be evicted, in death as he was in life? Then I think it does not matter, he is dead. Then I think it matters. Then I think it matters only to me.

I want my grandfather to have a home. I want him to have his own home because for the longest time, I thought he did and I thought the house I grew up in was his. I did not grow up in my father's house. My father has never owned a house nor can I comprehend how he could build a home. I grew up in my grandfather's house- a house he apparently did not own but which he turned, for me, into a home- the only home I have ever known; and another house he apparently did own, but which could never be, for me, a home. I want my grandfather to have a home, my grandfather deserves a home.

Chapter 3: The "Snake-Twins" of the Philippines

I

I assert that traditional Western narratives- in the social sciences, in political theory and in literature- exclude the experiences and histories of racialized people. When these traditional Western narratives do include the lives of racialized people, it is done so in a manner that facilitates exoticization. To this end, I turn to the example of the an essay entitled "The Snake-Twins of the Philippines." (Rudolph1988a, 1988b)

Calling my mother, I anxiously asked her if she had ever heard of "snake-twins". Laughing, my mother told me that "snake-twins" are only tall-tales and legends. My mother suggested that the term """snake-twins""" or *kambal ahas* is, simply, a label of shame attached to misbehaving and unruly children. When children act up and act out, when children do not obey their parents and elders, children may be reprimanded by being labeled a "snake" or that they are the missing twin of a snake: *"Ay! Kambal-ahas ka talaga!"* Telling her of an essay I had found of a man who went to the Philippines to research, to find, actual "snake-twins", to see the "snake-twins", my mother laughed. "He's going to have a hard time."

Along from my mother's contribution that the "snake-twins" is simply an expression used to reprimand unruly children, there are many "logical," "rational," and "scientific" ways to explain, hence demystify, the mystery and phenomenon of the "snake-twins." In briefly offering another possible way of understanding the "snake-twins," I do not wish to foreclose the possibility of the paranormal; indeed, there are many "ghosts" and "spirits" wandering the Philippines that have been produced from a

rich historical intersection of, amongst other things, the landscape, tribal and indigenous animism, colonialism, Catholicism, imperial aggression and war. Rather, I briefly offer the following to counter Rudolph's narrative that makes no mention of the "obvious" in the blind pursuit of the "exotic." The "snake-twins" of the Philippines can be understood, for example, as folklore emerging from the physical terrain and geography of the rural countryside. Of the fifteen cases that Rudolph investigated, none were in the city of Metro Manila- a sprawling city of nearly 10 million people. Rather, all of Rudolph's case studies were located in rural, countryside locales and in the provinces. Take for example, Rudolph's journey to the home of Javier Molina (a "snake-twin" whose case I shall shortly describe): a bamboo hut accessible only by foot. Rudolph writes that "After about 25 minutes of laborious progress through wet grass, water holes and slippery clay we got to the place where the Molinas had their house, that of a rice farmer: a landscape and house which one could have (equally) expected to see in some other place, such as Vietnam or Thailand." (Rudolph 1988a, 71) The Philippines is geographically situated on the equatorial region and thus, its climate, landscape and temperature, is more dense and "wild" than Europe or (most of) North America. There are many snakes. Stories emerge from the presence and proliferation of snakes.

Just as Rudolph operates within the paradigm of traditional colonial discourse- exoticizing the mysterious native and seeking to narrate the story of this aberrant Other- the Filipinos interviewed collude, to a degree, in perpetuating this narrative and preserving this relationship. At no point in Rudolph's encounters with Filipinos do any of them outright dismiss or reject his search proclaiming "No, Filipino woman gives birth to snake-twins" or "There are no such things as 'snake-twins'" Or "That is just folklore."

The Filipinos encountered by Rudolph are displaying a form of the colonial gesture by entertaining the questions and wonderings of the curious outsider (however it may be detrimental to their own character and personhood).

Rudolph's research and accompanying essay is problematic for a number of reasons. To begin with, his (fruitless) search for "snake-twins" is an example of racist "Orientalist" adventures that seeks to uncover one of the many mysteries of the "mysterious Orient." "The Philippines has long been known as an extraordinarily fascinating country in my own country…(and) there are especially two reasons that make Germans look upon the Philippines with different eyes than upon other parts of the East and Southeast Asia. One of these reasons is the presence of faith healers" with their "knifeless surgery"…the other reason is an ever growing number of Germans looking for wives from there." (1988a, 45-46) Rudolph's research is entangled in a complex socio-political matrix that positions the Philippines as a place waiting to be mined- for stories of the abnormal, medical cures, and eager women and brides or whatever else fancies or ails the "West." Indeed, there is a terrifyingly comical quality to Rudolph's description of his own "research" that only highlights the colonial and exoticizing tenor of his work. "Because of a meeting I had with an herbolario in one of the outlying localities of the diocese, a 75 year old fisherman, who told a tale about two fascinating encounters with water nymphs," Rudolph writes "I returned somewhat late to the bishop's house- where I had been expected with growing impatience." (1988a, 71) Jumping from rumours of snake-twins to stories of water nymphs, the Philippines is Rudolph's open research subject to fulfill ideas of the exotic. Rudolph's research is motivated by the notion of the "other's" (in this case, the Filipino's) aberrant biological physiology where women still

give birth to "snake-twins"- one a human child and the other a snake. Furthermore, a narrative that collapses the boundaries between the wildness of nature and the civility of culture as much as it indiscriminately collapses the boundaries between "past" and "present" and the heterogeneity of Filipino culture underpins Rudolph's research. Rudolph writes that he had obtained "the English translation of a report written by a Spanish missionary of the 17th century, who had personal experiences with "snake-twins"...referring to the Munoz text of Alcina's History of the Bisayan Islands (1668)..." We can glean several things from this statement. To begin with, Rudolph's research conducted between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s is supported by historical, colonial discourse that speculated on similar issues about the abnormal physiology and humanity of the indigenous inhabitants of the islands that would become the Philippines. Furthermore, Rudolph is indiscriminate in the appropriateness of his research material to his research objects. Rudolph's archival research has to do with islands and region of Visayas in the central Philippines while his research subjects, including the three upon which I focus, are from the island and region of Luzon in the northern Philippines. In blind haste, Rudolph neglects to recognize the enormous cultural and linguistics particularities amongst regions and provinces within the Philippines. In the true fashion of the (neo-)colonial outsider, Rudolph treats the "Philippines" as one homogenous entity.

Along with the content of Rudolph's research, his methodology is equally problematic. Most notable amongst the numerous errors in methodology and research gathering is Rudolph's failure to be consistent with his resources. In his report, Rudolph examines 15 cases of "snake-twins". While some of the cases he discusses are gleaned

second-hand from newspaper, magazine and tabloid reports, other cases involved fieldwork- traveling to the homes of the snake-twin families and interviewing family members, neighbours and the human-twin. While Rudolph taped most of his interviews with "snake-twins" and their families, there were several instances where Rudolph failed to tape interviews. "It is my intention to replace what I have now to present from memory- with all the resultant lack of exactness- with the transcribed data." (1988a, 60) In other cases, Rudolph shows blatant disregard for the importance of consistent procedures that necessitate taking into account all findings and evidence in order to make proper analyses and conclusions. In one instance, Rudolph writes that "I have to rely on memory because I have not yet found the time to transcribe my tapes." (1988a, 75) Where we can, perhaps, extend forgiveness towards Rudolph is in his admission of his own questionable research procedures. Rudolph admits the obvious gaps in his work- in one instance apologizing for his oversight: "Unfortunately, my notes do not show how the story ended." (1988a, 69) Our task, then, is to finish the story Rudolph has begun.

Indeed, the editor of the journal wrote a preface to Rudolph's essay that opened with the obvious: "This is a highly unusual paper, which is bound to cause a good deal of headshaking." (1988a, 45) Arguing that Rudolph's research- in its racist, colonial tenor and in its methodology- is fatally flawed, I therefore understand the dangers of using his essay and analysis to express my own. Verified as "scholarship" by virtue of its publication in a refereed, peer-reviewed journal despite its many flaws, I am well aware of the danger of reinforcing its dubious claim to scholarship by discussing it in length and figuring it so centrally in my own work. What I aim to provide a counter-narrative

against is the story of the "snake-twins"- a legend told and re-told and passed on from person to person. In his preface, the journal editor states that:

> I decided to publish the result of the investigations of Dr. Rudolph against the well-meant advice of several colleagues not to do so. As I pointed out to them and want to point out to our readers: Whatever may be the explanation for this admittedly strange and 'incredible' belief, it is as such worth reporting even if it were indeed merely a case of superstition. That even superstitions can be a legitimate object of research, need, I hope not be argued here. (1988a, 45)[6]

As such, what I aim to accomplish in this chapter is to dissect the most salient features of this folk-tale, this superstition that speaks directly to the concerns of the politics of colonialism and colonial discourse and their offsprings such as present-day racisms. In examining the story of the "snake-twins", I aim to uncover the most enduring features of this legend that have arrested the imagination and become the work of those who search for a physical truth that corresponds to these stories and, most importantly, the meaning of their search for those of us who are being looked upon with a quiet and curious gaze because of our mysterious origins, our supposedly suspicious births.

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[6] In criticizing Rudolph's essay, I wish to cast no aspersions towards the *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*. As often as we, in Canadian and North American universities, rightly raise the issue of government under-funding to universities which exacerbate the work of universities, including publishing and sustaining academic journals, surviving is doubly more challenging for journals published from universities in the Philippines where there is a history of no government support to many universities. As such, it is not my intention to call into question the teaching and research, the work, conducted at the University of San Carlos- Southeast Asia's oldest university, established in 1521. As Southeast Asian Studies, especially studies focusing on the Philippines, is a relatively new field of scholarship for many North American universities, especially Canadian universities (where it is non-existent), I am grateful for journals like the *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* that provide an important forum for Filipino scholars to examine pressing social and cultural issues. More pointedly, and from the perspective of a Filipino outside of the Philippines, in that interstitial space of being a hyphenated Filipino (-Canadian, in this case), I am grateful for being able to read a journal from the Philippines to see what issues are of concern to Filipinos in the Philippines.

II

Between 1978 and 1986, Ebermut Rudolph conducted ten research trips to the Philippines. In this time period, Rudolph examined cases of "snake-twins" gleaned from magazine articles, archival research, personal contacts and fieldwork. In order to ensure consistency in my own research and analysis, I will focus on the cases that Rudolph personally collected and examined. In total, there were fifteen of these cases. I will focus on three of these fifteen cases that will particularly contribute to my larger goal of articulating the importance of telling and writing stories for racialized people. I shall provide brief description of each of the three cases. After doing so, I will then discuss the issue which they have in common; namely telling, speaking and writing their own stories.

The first case is that of Dindo Centeno of Bulacan, a province north of Manila. Rudolph heard about Dindo as he was trying to interview a faith healer. So popular was the faith healer, Rudolph could not get an interview with him. In conversation with the local priest, Father Solomon, Rudolph was informed of a local case of a "snake-twin"- Dindo Centeno. Father Solomon told Rudolph:

> I have seen that snake with my own eyes. When the boy was still small, there were (many) snakes visiting him. And in their house...where the boy was born- the companion snakes of the snake-twin used to visit the house, swarms of them. One day the mother was really very much afraid seeing so many snakes. She went to the police for help to drive them away. When the police arrived we went there, but when the policemen saw those snakes, they were scared...there were so many of them. But the snakes did not harm the people. One day, the mother told me, as she went upstairs to look after the boy- he was yet so small he could not sit up- she found him playing with snakes...right there in the house. The boy is now eleven; he will not speak about this matter (to other people), only to his mother. The mother then will relay what her son tells her...(1988a, 63)

Dindo's father support Father Solomon's story.

> When Dindo was still in his mother's womb, there were lots of snakes which we saw in our house: real snakes, big ones, 2 meter long, In the cellar and also in our room. Did we ever see snakes before (that time)? No, never. But some time before the birth of the boy and also afterwards, we saw lots of snakes, even underneath his crib...One of them was born with Dindo. It came out together with his...When he was born, the snake twin came with him...the same way out of his mother's womb. (1988a, 64)

The second case is that of Javier Molina[7]. In Bangued, Abra province, Rudolph heard about another case of a snake-twin from a local bishop, Odilo Etspueler. Arranging for a meeting, Javier Molina reports to the bishop's house, accompanied by his teacher. After some prodding from the teacher, Javier speaks:

> My name is Javier Molina. I am in Grade Six- no, Grade Five. I live in Lucbong, Tayum (Abra). My mother's name is Virginia Molina. My father's name is Clemente Molina. We are (a) very poor family. I am second to the eldest. I have one brother and one sister. Since birth, I have a friend, a snake, which I named "Brownie." The color is somewhat brown. (1988a, 70)

Javier's teacher continues his story:

> When Mrs. Molina- the mother of this boy gave birth- two days after delivering this boy- then suddenly they noticed that a very tiny snake was playing near the cradle of this boy. And so they noticed the first days that this snake cannot be chased away and when the boy grew bigger, one week already, the snake was there until then. Even in the cradle of this boy, the snake was going under the pillow of this boy. And the mother was very astonished that they have such an experience with a snake. Later on, the father got angry and then they chased the snake. The snake went out suddenly, the third day, the snake came back. After three days, the snake is with the boy. (1988a, 71)

At the Molina household, Mr. Clemente Molina, continues the story of Javier and his snake-twin:

> When my son was still very small, very young, we found out that he...our little boy, has a playmate, a small snake. This small snake is coming to him very frequently and sometimes- because I am afraid the snake will bite my boy- I took a stick and took the snake and threw it (out of) the window. Now when it was thrown out the following day again the snake came back and when my boy is sleeping the snake

[7] In Rudolph's report, Javier is introduced as Javier but Rudolph refers to him interchangeably as Javier and "Ave", the boy's nickname. For purposes of consistency and clarity, I will refer to Javier as Javier.

> crawled secretly under the pillow of the boy. And so from then on we were always aware that the snake is always with our boy. So I made the promise that that I should try my best that I should get rid of the snake but even then my boy was becoming bigger and bigger- he is now in grade five. Still the snake too became bigger and the snake is a playmate with him. (1988a, 72)

The third and final case that I will describe is that of Pablo. Pablo's case is different than Dindo's and Javier's in that while Rudolph initially met and interviewed Dindo and Javier as young boys and met them several times later in the following years until they were adults, Rudolph met Pablo as a 24 year old man in August of 1984. Rudolph's description of Pablo's history is very brief; we learn little about Pablo and the circumstances of his birth with the snake twin, unlike Rudolph's accounts of his meetings with Dindo and Javier. Rather than gaining more information and knowledge about Pablo's particular circumstances, we receive Rudolph's evaluation of this 24 year-old snake twin. Rudolph noted that Pablo claimed to be a college graduate and evaluated that "in the Philippines, that can mean 'everything or nothing'." (1988b, 253) Rudolph writes that after a "short exchange of words (with Pablo) leaves me with the impression of a not very trustworthy young man, and the warning of my friends about his 'smartness' appears to be justified." (1988b, 254) Rudolph notes that he did find out one important thing. "I have, however, learned one important thing: Pablo has begun to write a diary to record the history of his life." (1988b, 254)

On a subsequent visit, Pablo allows Rudolph to look at his diary and tells Rudolph that

> I wrote a some(thing) about my story....a life story of Tawak. That's why I am very much concentrated (to) finish that topic because maybe before the end of this year I want to publish (it) to give to some people who want to know about my life..." (1988b, 254)

Upon receiving this information Rudolph asks Pablo the following: "What gave you the idea to write it down, your history? You are the first person I have met to reflect on his experiences and decide to write them down? What gave you that marvelous idea? (1988b, 254) Pablo responds:

> During that time when I was alone here, in my hide-away, I got a dream, because my friends...he is in the Philippines...I read his autobiography. I think I can manage myself to create the topic; that's why (at) one time I got my piece of ballpen, also a piece of paper: So I wrote my autobiography so at the moment I stopped it because I got a problem, but this time I had no problem. I was able to complete my whole biography. (1988b, 254)

Rudolph does not pursue a line of questioning related to Pablo's life-story and autobiography. Rather, Rudolph asks "Pablo, did you really finish your college education?" (1988b, 254)

III

As illustrated through his questions to, and evaluations of, Pablo, Rudolph displays a level of pity, contempt, and hostility for his research object. Dindo, Rudolph tells us, is "...exceptionally talented...in Colombit, he was the best in his school; in Sta. Isabela, he is still No.Two. He is artistically gifted, wins first prizes. What is important" Rudolph continues "is that Dindo became a faith healer, or as he is called in the Philippines, a *herbolario*." (1988a, 65) Two years after his initial visit, Rudolph returned to visit Javier and made the assessment that "(Javier) seemed to have lingered behind in his development. He simply did not want to stop playing with his little friends, the dwarfs, and because of that often willfully paid not attention when his mother called him to dinner or for some work around the house." (1988a, 76) Rudolph evaluated that what Javier needed was a good education. Javier was enrolled in school

but did not fare very well and was soon sent home. Upon visiting Javier again in 1985- which would be Rudolph's last documented visit with the boy- a colleague warned Rudolph that Javier had proven to be "'a rascal,' perhaps even a 'crook'." (Rudolph 1988a, 77). Rudolph reports that "I met my protégé again in August 1985 in his bamboo hut in Lucbong. He did not strike me as a crook but rather as a pitiable young man. I gave him 100 pesos." (1988,a 77)

It is no coincidence that of the three cases of ""snake-twins"" which I have outlined, Rudolph shows the most contempt for the two individuals who speak for themselves: Ave and Pablo. Evidently, there is danger in speaking for yourself. In speaking for himself, Javier disrupts the narrative Rudolph is both immersed in and the narrative in which he seeks to (re) tell the world. Javier tells his own story. Remember the first meeting with Rudolph: "My name is Javier Molina. I am in Grade Six- no, Grade Five." Javier tells his own story. While others- his father, his mother- still provide other pieces of Javier's birth and childhood with the snake-twin, Javier relays to us his own story, his own account and analysis of the situation, his own feelings. In contrast to Dindo who does not speak and relays everything through his mother (who, in not speaking, is in keeping with Rudolph's Orientalist notions of the mute, subservient and agreeable Oriental), Javier assumes an active role in telling his own story. And very importantly, in a written text with an "author" who has at his disposal editorial powers to include and omit pieces, to "authorize" which stories are included in the pages that we, the readers, removed from the encounter, read, and in the context of Rudolph's hostility towards Javier, we should be grateful that we hear Javier's voice however much an authorial, deconstructive accident its inclusion was. *"My name is Javier Molina..."*

The specifics of the other cases are relayed to Rudolph (and to us) by mothers, fathers, neighbours and teachers who have known the "snake-twins". It is told in a passive, or altogether disembodied and non-existent voice. Concomitantly, Rudolph desires to embed himself in this chain of storytellers, these "witnesses," to the mysterious "snake-twins", by telling us their story. Here lies the challenge for a child like Javier. Rudolph evaluates that Javier is "behind in his development-" because he won't stop playing with his snake-twin- without properly contextualizing Javier's situation. Javier experiences violence at home; his father beats him. Rudolph writes that he was informed by Javier's teacher "about the continued hostility of the family against the snake friend of the boy. But the scoldings and even an occasional beating, which he got from his father, did not break the bond between the "twins." (1988a, 74) This fact is mentioned in passing and warrants no lengthy discussion in Rudolph's report. In the context of violence in the home, the only "positive," physically non-violent attention he receives, like attention from Rudolph, is about his snake-twin, which, ironically, is the also the reason why his father beats him and furthermore is the reason why Rudolph labels him developmentally behind. Javier is in a bind. To give up the snake-twin may or may not ensure that the beatings from his father will end but it will most certainly ensure that attention from others will cease. Without the snake-twin he is, under Western eyes, another poor Filipino kid, doubtless to be worth more than a passing glance from the gaze of a missionary German pastor and anthropologist.

Just as there is danger in speaking for yourself, there is also danger in writing for yourself and writing your own story as in the case of Pablo who is writing his life-story and who hopes to publish his autobiography. Pablo presents a threat to Rudolph. Not

only does Pablo speak for himself, Pablo also writes and he is writing a story about his life. Imaginably and reasonably, this life-story will include his life as a snake-twin that would be in direct competition with the story Rudolph seeks to tell. Pablo, much like Javier, disrupts the narrative chain of which Rudolph was hoping to be a part for relaying the phenomenon of the "snake-twins" to a wider audience. In searching and finding his object, there is a level of frustration and disappointment when the object speaks and when the object writes. In speaking their stories, in writing their stories, Javier and Dindo challenge the ability of Rudolph, and other like-minded ethnographic researchers, to tell their own stories. In speaking, in trying to tell their stories, Pablo and Javier are breaking the custodial control being enforced upon them by curious outsiders who want to, in the tradition of colonial discourse, in the manner of parents to children, tell their stories for them. With competing speakers, storytellers and authors, the question, then, is who will get to tell their story? Furthermore, to whom will we listen?

During the years of my sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story....I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise; grew discouraged and travelled on.

-*Tracks*, Louise Erdrich

Chapter 4: *"The sentence of history"*: Jamaica Kincaid and the Politics of Life-Writing

I

In this chapter, I intend to discuss the politics of autobiography and life-writing. To begin with, I must address the importance of writing, and indeed "literacy" or the ability to read and write, for racialized peoples. To this end, I turn to an essay by eminent African-American literary scholar and Harvard University professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. In the essay "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes" (1985), Gates writes the story of African-American slave Phyllis Wheatley. In the spring of 1772, Gates writes, the eighteen year-old Wheatley appeared before a committee of eighteen of Boston's most prominent citizens. The august group had assembled in order to examine Wheatley on the book of poems she claimed to have written. We do not know what they asked her. Gates asks us to imagine what could have happened between the young, black slave girl and eighteen white men. "Perhaps" Gates imagines

> they asked her identify and explain- for all to hear- exactly who were the Greek and Latin gods and poets alluded to so frequently in her work. Perhaps they asked her to conjugate a verb in Latin, or even to translate randomly selected passages from the Latin which she and her master, John Wheatley, claimed that she "had made some progress in." Or perhaps they asked her to recite from memory key passages from the texts of John Milton and Alexander Pope, the two poets by whom the African claimed to be most directly influenced. We do not know. (1985, 7)

Whatever happened in that room, whatever the eighteen white men asked the young black slave girl, her responses were enough to convince them to write and sign an "Attestation" that included the following:

> We whose Names are underwritten, do assure the World, that the poems specified in the following Page, were (as we veribly believe) written by Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a Few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa, and has ever since

> been, and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best judges, and is thought qualified to write them. (in Gates 1985, 7)

The following year, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, was published. (with the "Attestation" prefacing the volume of poems). Aside from being "one of the oddest oral examinations on record," Gates writes "it is only a tiny part of a larger, and even more curious episode in the Enlightenment (for) since the beginning of the seventeenth century, Europeans had wondered about whether or not the African 'species of men,' as they most commonly put it, *could* ever create formal literature, could ever master 'the arts and sciences.' If they could, the argument ran, then the African variety of humanity and the European variety were fundamentally related. If not, then, it seemed clear that the African was destined by nature to be a slave." (1985, 8)

Gates offers one reason as to why there was such an emphasis on the creative writing of Africans suggesting that "after Rene Descartes, *reason* was privileged, or valorized, above all other human characteristics. Writing, especially after the printing press became so widespread, was taken to be the *visible* sign of reason." (1985, 8) The link between the capacity of reason for African slaves, their humanity and thus their literal freedom, would become more explicit. Gates writes that

> George Moses Horton had, by the middle of the 1820s, gained a considerable reputation at Chapel Hill as "the slave poet." His master printed full page advertisements in Northern newspapers soliciting subscriptions for a book on Horton's poems and promising to exchange the slave's freedom for a sufficient return on sales of the book. Writing, for these slaves, was not an activity of mind; rather, it was a commodity which they were forced to trade for their humanity. (1985, 9)

I made the point in the second chapter that the issue for racialized people is simultaneously that of structure and agency. Having the ability to write, being literate, the task for racialized people, then, is to write in ways that challenge existing and

established structural discourses without narrating ourselves back into the same modes of writing which have erased our experiences and our histories and which has also cast doubts on and raises speculations about our very humanity. Towards this goal, I intend to show that life-writing is a valuable tool for racialized people to counter racist assault and denigration that, as evidenced in the previous chapter's example of Ebermut Rudolph and the snake-twins of the Philippines, casts doubts on and raises speculations, amongst other things, on the humanity of racialized people- beginning with our mysterious origins, our supposedly suspicious births. By reflecting upon and recording our lives, by writing our lives, we can offer an account and a testimony to where our bodies have been, what we have been doing and who we are. I will frame my discussion about racialization, autobiography, life-writing and its relation to the personal and the political through the writings of Antiguan-American novelist and Harvard University professor Jamaica Kincaid. Kincaid's body of works- her magazine articles, essays, short stories, novels and memoirs- forcefully illustrate Homi Bhabha's suggestion that "…it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history- subjugation, domination, diaspora and displacement- that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking." (1994, 172)

The more one reads the works of Jamaica Kincaid, the more one becomes increasingly aware of certain recurring themes and issues. For example, beginning with her 1983 short story collection, the critically praised and award-winning *At the Bottom of the River*, the reader becomes aware of the emphasis on mother-daughter relationships through such stories as the widely anthologized "Girl" and "My Mother." Kincaid's desire to examine mother-daughter relationships assumes a more singular focus in her

first novel, the highly acclaimed *Annie John* (1985) and furthermore in *Lucy* (1990). Moreover, mother-daughter relationships continue to figure prominently in her body of work as evidenced in the publication of *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) and in her National Book Award-nominated memoir, *My Brother* (1997).

Along with recurring issues and themes that emerge from her body of work, a reader also becomes aware of recurring characters, stories and events. There is the story, for example, of the fisherman who cursed God for his poor luck in catching fish. We are introduced to this story in her first novel, *Annie John*:

> My father's great-grandfather had been a fisherman, but he must have been a bad fisherman, for he never caught many fish in his fishpots. One day, when he went out to search his pots, he found the usual two or three small fish, and it made him so angry, that he picked up the fish, said to God to kiss his backside and threw the fish back in the water. A curse fell on him, and shortly thereafter, he took very ill and died. Just before he died, his skin burst open, as if he were an overfull pea shell, and his last words were "Dem damn fish." (Kincaid 1985, 122)

In a slightly revised version, this story re-appears in Kincaid's latest novel *Mr. Potter* (2002):

> One day, when he went to his fish pots, they were filled with nothing, and on that day he needed them to be filled with fish. And one day when he cast his net, he caught nothing, not even the stray piece of rubbish produced by the land or by the sea. And first he was filled with a feeling of awe, of wonderment, at the perfection of the emptiness: his fish pots, his fishnet, making up, as they did, his life as he knew it, his life as he could feel it; but his immediate need was for a fish pot full of fish and a fishnet, as it coursed through the seawaters not far from the shorė, to ensnare scores of anything living in the shallow waters of the sea. And that one day of fruitlessness, that first day of fish pots and fishnet empty of everything, was repeated again and again; for many days after, Nathaniel Potter found his fish pots and fishnet empty of prey, and his prey was the very thing that sustained his world. And after many days of this particular emptiness, of this particular silence, Nathaniel Potter cursed God. And these were his actions: he cut his fish pots from their anchors, letting them go drifting into the shallow and deep waters of the blue sea, and then, removing his trousers, he caused his bare bottom to face the sky and in an angry cry he asked God to kiss it; and his fishnet yielded nothing, not a single thing was trapped in his fishnet, and this fishnet, each knot in it, he knew well, for he had made his fishnet himself. And he cursed God…(2002, 43-44)

As in the version in *Annie John*, this re-telling has a similar ending:

> And: a curse fell on Nathaniel Potter and this curse took the form of small boils appearing on his arms and then on his legs and then on the rest of his body and then at last covering his face. And the small boils festered and leaked a pus that had a smell like nothing that had ever lived before and all his bodily fluids were turned into the pus that leaked out of him and he no longer cursed at whatever it was that he thought had made him and the world in which he lived, and he even banished from his mind any thoughts of whatever it was, or whosoever it was, that had made him and the world in which he had lived. (2002, 47)

A marked difference between the stories from *Annie John* and *Mr. Potter* is the story's context. While including many autobiographical references, *Annie John* is a novel. *Mr. Potter*, on the other hand, while sold as a novel, is unabashedly autobiographical. While the fisherman is Annie John's paternal great-grandfather, the fisherman in *Mr. Potter* is Jamaica Kincaid's grandfather, Nathaniel Potter. The identity of Jamaica Kincaid, her grandfather and her father are confirmed in the closing lines of the chapter in *Mr. Potter* from which I have taken my example:

> And Nathaniel Potter died and left many children- he knew of eleven and when he died he could not read and he could not write, and he had not made any children who could do so. Among the names of his children were Walter and Roderick and Frances and Joseph and David and Truehart and John and Benjamin and Baldwin and Mineu and Nigel, their names taken from the history that has been captured in the written word and also from the history of the spoken word. And Roderick was my father but he could not read or write either, Nathaniel Potter only made Roderick Potter and he was my father but he could not read or write, he only made me and I can read and I am also writing all of this at this very moment; at this very moment, I am thinking of Nathaniel Potter and I can place my thoughts about him and all that he was and all that he could have been into words. These are all words, all of them, these words are my own. (2002, 48)

In having similar characters and events in both works of fiction and non-fiction, we are then compelled to question what is fact and what is fiction. Kincaid cleverly acknowledges her strategy of blurring fact and fiction, the autobiographical and the literary, in the December 8, 1980 "Talk of the Town" article she wrote for *The New*

Yorker. Invited to a lunch launching a novel by Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, Kincaid writes:

> Oriana Fallaci's novel, titled *A Man*, is about a hero of the Greek resistance who uncovers evidence of great corruption and all around wrongdoing in powerful circles in Greek politics but is killed before he can expose the wicked people. In real life, Oriana Fallaci said to her guests, she was in love with a hero of the Greek resistance who uncovered evidence of great corruption and all around wrong-doing in powerful circles in Greek politics but was killed before he could expose the wicked people. (2001, 202)

Kincaid's illustration of the strategy of blurring fact and fiction, the autobiographical and the literary, is doubly more penetrating because it is through the work of another author that she illustrates this point. Indeed, the preceding passage has relevance and salience with regards to Kincaid's own strategy of blurring fact and fiction when the reader reads more and more of Kincaid's works to discover recurring issues and similar situations, stories, events and characters. The recurrence of characters, stories and events in Kincaid's works of fiction and non-fiction, then, urge us to question the categories constituting "fact" and "fiction" or the "autobiographical" and the "literary," the "public" and the "private" and most definitely the "personal" and the "political." To answer this question, I turn to a discussion of the politics of autobiography.

II

Autobiography has a long history. Despite often being criticized as an inferior and secondary form of literature, the autobiography has been employed by many individuals. The *Confessions* of Jean Jacques Rousseau was published in 1782. Major literary figures like Gertrude Stein (*The Mother of Us All*), Anais Nin (*The Diaries of Anais Nin*), Vladimir Nabokov (*Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, 1966) have all written autobiographies. Furthermore, there have been many debates as to the

autobiographical content of novels from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) to Philip Roth's *My Life as a Man* (1974). On the other hand, there are some complete oeuvres, such as Christopher Isherwood's, which are understood as largely autobiographical. Furthermore, the autobiography has been a mode of personal and political discourse for several prominent civil-rights leaders such as Malcolm X (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 1965) and Angela Davis (*Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 1974) Moreover, the autobiography has become a prominent genre for many scholars working in postcolonial and or feminist theory, most notably Audre Lorde (*Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, 1981) Sara Suleri Goodyear (*Meatless Days*, 1989) and Meena Alexander (*Fault Lines*, 1994).

Having established that the works of Jamaica Kincaid are largely autobiographical, I now turn to further examples of the concept of the "autobiographical" in Kincaid's writings in order to further examine the importance of autobiography and writing to the lives of racialized peoples. There is an interesting example of autobiography in *Annie John*. On her first day at a new school, Annie John is required to write an "autobiographical essay" which they would all then share with the other class members. The inclusion of a section on the writing of an autobiography is doubly more interesting because we know- from reading other fiction and non-fiction works written by Kincaid and noticing within them recurring themes, issues and similar characters, events and situations- that *Annie John* is largely autobiographical. With this in mind, we are then urged to question the reliability of autobiography based on personal memory and recollection. "What I had written was heartfelt," said Annie John "and, except for the

very end, it was all true." As she did with her classmates, I will let Annie John tell her own story:

> When I was a small child, my mother and I used to go down to Rat Island on Sundays right after church so I could bathe in the sea....My mother was a superior swimmer. When she plunged into the water, it was as if she had always lived there. She would go far out if it was safe to do so, and she could tell just by looking at the way the waves beat if it was safe to do so. She could tell if a shark was nearby, and she had never been stung by a jellyfish. I, on the other hand, could not swim at all. In fact, if I was in water up to my knees I was sure I was drowning...One day, in the midst of watching my mother swim and dive, I heard a commotion far out at sea. It was three ships going by, and they were filled with people. They must have been celebrating something, for the ships would blow their horns and the people would cheer in response. After they passed out of view, I turned back to look at my mother, but I could not see her. My eyes searched the small area of water where she should have been, but I couldn't find her. I stood up and started to call out her name, but no sound would come out of my throat. A huge black space then opened up in front of me and I fell inside it. I couldn't see what was in front of me and I couldn't hear anything around me. I couldn't think of anything except that my mother was no longer near me. Things went on in this way for I don't know how long. I don't know what, but something drew my eye in one direction. A little bit out of the area in which she usually swam was my mother, just sitting and tracing patterns on a large rock. She wasn't paying attention to me, for she didn't know that I missed her. I was glad to see her and started jumping up and down and waving to her. Still she didn't see me, and then I started to cry, for it dawned on me that, with all that water in between us and I being unable to swim, my mother could stay there forever and the only way I would be able to wrap my arms around her again was if it pleased her or if I took a boat. (1983, 42-44)

Annie John's recollection of physical loss and despair takes on even greater poignancy since she writes this shortly after the degeneration of her once seemingly perfect relationship with her mother. Bewildered and saddened at their increasing estrangement- reflected in Annie John's loss of voice when her pleas to her mother across the sea are unanswered- Annie John is able to regain two things through writing her "autobiographical essay" and sharing her story.

To begin with, she is able to articulate her sense of loss; something she is not able to do with her own mother. Secondly, she is able to begin the process of establishing an

individual identity through the appreciation of her classmates who were awed by her eloquence and who were "jostling each other to say some words of appreciation and congratulations to me, my head felt funny as if it had swelled up to the size of, and weighed no more than, a blown-up balloon." (1983, 45) Annie John finishes her story with the following:

> The summer just past, I kept having a dream about my mother sitting on the rock. Over and over I would have the dream- only in it my mother never came back, and sometimes my father would join her. When he joined her, they would both sit tracing patterns on the rock, and it must have been amusing, for they would always make each other laugh. At first I didn't say anything, but when I began to have the dream again and again, I finally told my mother. My mother became instantly distressed; tears came to her eyes, and, taking me in her arms, she told me all the same things she had told me on the day at the sea, and this the memory of the dark time when I felt would never see her again did not come back to haunt me. (1983, 44-45)

"I didn't exactly tell a lie about the last part. That is just what would have happened in the old days," writes Annie John. She continues

> But actually the past year saw me launched into youngladyness, and when I told my mother of my dream- my nightmare, really- I was greeted with a turned back and a warning against eating certain kinds of fruit in an unripe state just before going to bed. I placed the old days' version before my classmates because, I thought, I couldn't bear to show my mother in a bad light before people who hardly knew her. But the real truth was that I couldn't bear to have anyone see how deep in disfavour I was with my mother. (1983, 45)

By writing an "autobiographical essay," by telling her own story, Annie John is able to symbolically bridge the gap that has separated her from her mother and, in some way, simultaneously compensate for and reclaim what she has lost. As personal history is re-written, so to is national history. To this, I turn to another example from Jamaica Kincaid.

One of the most interesting and subversive moments in Kincaid's body of work is a chapter in *Annie John* entitled "Columbus in Chains."

> In this chapter, there was a picture of Columbus that took up a whole page, and it was in color- one of only five colour pictures in the book. In this picture, Columbus was seated in the bottom of a ship...His hands and feet were bound up in chains, and he was sitting there staring off into space, looking quite dejected and miserable. The picture had a title "Columbus in Chains," at the bottom of the page. (1983, 77)

Shortly after seeing this picture, she overhears her mother reading a letter from her sister. Apparently, their father's health is deteriorating. Having a bad relationship with her father, Annie John's mother, laughing, said, "So the great man can no longer just get up and go. How I would love to see his face now." (1983, 78) Echoing her mother's sentiment about her father, Annie John states that "When I next saw the picture of Columbus sitting there all locked up in chains, I wrote under it the words "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go." (1985, 78)

With this act of vandalism, with this act of literal and symbolic defacement, Annie John has accomplished two things. Evaluating the same condition for Christopher Columbus and her grandfather (both of whom she has never met), she has drawn a symbolic line linking and joining the colonizer and the colonized, the historical and the domestic thus simultaneously familiarizing two foreign and alien things. More importantly, Annie John has, quite literally, re-written history.

This particular episode is especially interesting and subversive because it is an example of a child thinking and theorizing about history. This is evident when Annie John speaks of her classmate Ruth

> Ruth, of course, did not know the answer, as she did not know the answer to many questions about the West Indies. I could hardly blame her. Ruth had come all the way from England. Perhaps she did not want to be in the West Indies at all. Perhaps she wanted to be in England, where no one would remind her constantly of the terrible things her ancestors had done; perhaps she felt even worse when her father was a missionary in Africa. I could see how Ruth felt from looking at her face. Her ancestors had been the masters, while ours had been the slaves. She had such a lot to be ashamed of, and by being with us everyday she was always being reminded. We could look

> everybody in the eye, for our ancestors had done nothing wrong except just sit somewhere, defenseless…I was sure that if the tables had been turned we would have acted differently; I was sure that if our ancestors had gone from Africa to Europe and come upon the people living there, they would have taken a proper interest in the Europeans on first seeing them, and said, "How nice," and then gone home to tell their friends about it. (1983, 76)

Through speculation, Annie John occupies the position of Ruth who, while being white and English, now occupies the position of the "other" in Antigua. Once again drawing a line linking history and more immediate personal experiences, Annie John turns a level of empathy for the displaced Ruth with the evaluation that her discomfort and unhappiness stems in part from the wrongdoings of her ancestors. Moreover, Annie John once more re-writes history by theorizing that Africans would not have acted like Europeans and engendered a system of slavery, subjugation and oppression.

Autobiography, then, is a site of encounter for the colonizer and the colonized as much as it is the site of encounter for binaries once thought to be in distant opposition: "fact" and "fiction," the "public" and the "private" and most definitely the "personal" and the "political." This designed and deliberate conflation of personal and national history, the blurring of fact and fiction, is a useful device for subverting the often compartmentalized, discreet and "neat" version of History which is always told from the victor's point of view and which erases the history of the peoples it has subjugated within its margins. By illustrating the relationship between fact and fiction, literature and autobiography, Kincaid invites the reader to question the originary source and moment of History and or to question altogether if such a decisive moment even exists.

III

Through questioning the construction of History- who tells it, how it is told- writing and the written word becomes the site of encounter for the colonizer and the colonized, the personal and the historical, the writer and the reader. Within the writings of Jamaica Kincaid, we are urged to think about the connection between death, life, writing and reading. I turn to an indelibly haunting theme that is told and re-told in Jamaica Kincaid's memoir, *My Brother.* (1997) I will quote the passage in length; I ask you for your kind patience. Kincaid writes that:

> My youngest brother was two years old when one day he was left in my charge, my mother placed him in my care while she ran errands; perhaps I knew what these errands were, but I no longer do, I cannot remember what it was she had to do and so left me alone to care for him. Mr. Drew, our father (though his father, not really mine), was not at home. But I liked reading a book much more than I liked looking after him (and even now I liked reading more than looking after my own children, but looking after my own children is something I cannot describe in terms of liking or anything), and even then I would have said that I loved books but did not love him at all, only that I loved him because I was supposed to and what else could I do. All day I was left to look after him, and all day, instead of doing so, I read a book, a book whose title and ploy or anything else about I cannot remember just now. The day must have passed in the same rhythm as the pace in which I turned the pages (and I recognize this way of phrasing this event as romantic, even literary, for the day must have passed with its own usualness and did not care about me in particular or in general), and so when I finished reading the book I realized the day was ending and my mother would soon return home. Between my coming to the end of the book and the time my mother should return home there were many minutes remaining, only minutes left for the chores that should have taken me a an entire day to complete. I did the things I thought my mother would notice immediately; changing my brothers diaper was not among them. This was the first thing my mother noticed, and only now I can say (because I can see) "Of course." My brother, the one who was dying, who has died, who while dying could not take himself to the bathroom and freely control is bowel movements, than as a little boys, two years old, wore diapers and needed to have someone change them from time to tome when they grew soiled. That day (and I cannot remember if it was a Monday, a Tuesday, or a Wednesday, but I do know with certainty that it was not a Saturday or a Sunday) when I have been reading instead of taking care of him, I did not notice that in his diaper was a deposit of my brother's stool, and by the time my mother returned from her errands- and she did notice it- the deposit of

stool had hardened and taken the shape of a measure of weight, something used in a grocery store or in the fish market or the market where only ground provisions are sold; it was the size of that measure signifying a pound. And in it, this picture of my brother's hardened stool, a memory, a moment of my own life is frozen; for his diaper sagged with a weight that was not gold but its opposite, a weight whose value would not bring us good fortune, a weight that only emphasized our family's despair: our fortunes, our prospects were not more than the contents of my brother's diaper, and the contents were only shit. When my mother saw his unchanged diaper, it was the realization of this that released in her a fury toward me, a fury so fierce that I believed (and this was then, but even now many years later I am not convinced otherwise) that she wanted me dead, thought not in a way that would lead to the complications of taking in my actual existence and then its erasure, for she was my mother, my own real mother, and my erasure at her own hands would have cost her something then; my erasure now, my death now, before her own, would make her feel regal, triumphant that she had outlived all her inferiors: her inferiors are her offspring. She mourns beautifully, she is admirable in mourning; if I were ever to be in mourning, this is the model, the example, I would imitate. At that stage of my life, I was fifteen, my brother was two years old- I was unable to help her make sense of her life. The man she had married was sick and could not really build houses anymore, he could not really make furniture anymore; she might have loved him for many moments, I never knew, but there was a child almost two years old, there was a child almost four years old, there was a child almost six years old. These were all his children. I was not his child, I was not a part of the real debacle of her life, and then again, worst of all, I could not help her out of it. I insisted on reading books. In a fit of anger I can remember so well, as if it had been a natural disaster, as if it had been a hurricane or an erupting volcano, or just simply the end of the world, my mother found my books, all the books that I had read, some of them books I had bought, though with money I had stolen, some of them books I had simply stolen, for once I read a book, no matter its literary quality I could not part with it. (I then had no sense of literary quality, literary quality being a luxury, a luxury being absent from my existence unless I saw an illustration of what this might be on a cheap tin of powder imported from England, and this picture of luxury only demonstrated what it might look like if one did not have to work at all, and so luxury was presented as contempt for working and any association with the dullness of the everyday.) A cauldron of words, even a world perhaps, may have passed, but not between us, though by then it would have been only one way, for I could make no response. But there was a moment when in a fury at me for not taking care of her mistakes (my brother with the lump of shit in his diapers, his father who was sick and could not properly support his family, who even when well had made a family that he could not properly support, her mistake in marrying a man so lacking, so lacking) she looked in every crevice of our yard, under our house, under my bed (for I did have such a thing and this was unusual, that in our family, poor, lacking a tradition of individual privacy and whether that is a good thing, whether all human beings should aspire to such a thing, privacy, their thought known only to them, to be debated and mulled over only by them, I do not know), and in all those places she found my books, the things that come between me and the smooth flow of her life, her many children that she could not support, that she and her husband (the man

> books, but I could not really tell if it was he or if I just wanted it to be he, so that all these events in my life would come together: my brother dying, the memory of my books being burned because I had neglected my brother who was dying when he was a small child, a boy named Lindsay who might have been one of the fathers of my numerous children, the what really happened, the what might have really happened, and how it led to what was actually happening. And then again, and then again. (2001, 128-136)

You will kindly recall Homi Bhabha's suggestion that "...it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history- subjugation, domination, diaspora and displacement- that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking." (1994, 172) It is up to the living to tell the stories that could not be told by those who have died. Writing our life, and in turn the life of others, is the "sentence," the "sentence of history," as it were, of racialized people. This passage is a perfect example of the many ways in which "the sentence of history" can be understood. While this work is not a literary analysis of Kincaid's prose style and form, I will nonetheless venture into the fringes of this territory if only to illustrate my argument that there is much to learn about the experiences, lives and realities of racialized peoples from the genre of life-writing as evidenced in Kincaid's body of work.

Those who have spent considerable time writing and re-writing are well aware of the warnings about long sentences. Long sentences are cumbersome, unwieldy, bulky and burdensome. Instead, those who have spent considerable time writing and re-writing who are well aware of the warnings about long sentences, are urged to write short, precise and concise sentences which, according to experts and authorities, are considerably more comprehensible and bearable for the reader. As evidenced in the passage from *My Brother*, Kincaid opts for another route. Kincaid's sentences are often lengthy. Especially in the sample passage, Kincaid uses commas and semi-colons liberally to expand on thoughts and ideas by providing new recollections, new details,

new dimensions and new perspectives to the initial thought. A sentence is imposed upon the reader who reads Kincaid's sentences. A certain level of endurance is required on the part of the reader to follow the initial thought to its conclusion; a certain level of patience is required on the part of the reader to retrace and reread if the strand of thought has been lost or misplaced from the beginning of the sentence to its final period.

Along with commas and semi-colons, Kincaid uses parentheses throughout the paragraph. Much like commas and semi-colons, parentheses can be used to add new details and thus new perspectives to the idea conveyed in a sentence. (such as when Kincaid writes: "That day (I cannot remember if it was a Monday, a Tuesday, or a Wednesday, but I do know with certainty that it was not a Saturday or a Sunday) when I had been reading instead of taking care of him…). (1997, 130)

Furthermore, the parentheses can be used to strengthen the official authorial voice (the one telling the story and the one whom the reader acknowledges is telling the story) by providing support for the author's thoughts. An example of this can be found, for instance, near the beginning of the quoted passage when Kincaid writes: "But I liked reading a book much more than I liked looking after him (and even now I like reading a book more than I like looking after my own children, but looking after my own children is something I cannot describe in terms of liking or anything else),…" (2001, 129) The words outside the parenthesis and the words inside the parenthesis provide us with a contextualized picture of Kincaid. The words outside the parenthesis are Kincaid as a fifteen-year-old daughter asked by her mother to watch her little two-year old brother. The words inside the parenthesis belong to Kincaid as a mother herself talking about her own children. Either inside the parenthesis or outside the parenthesis, however, the

reader is aware of Kincaid's preferences supported by the beginning of the words in the parenthesis: "and even now…"

Moreover, the parenthesis can be used to signal self-reflection (or perhaps it is more accurate to say self-awareness and self-consciousness). This is evident, for example, when Kincaid writes: "The day must have passed in the same rhythm as the pace with which I turned the pages (and I recognize this way of phrasing this event as romantic, even as literary, for the day must have passed with its own usualness and did not care about me in particular or in general),…" (2001, 129) The words "I recognize" in parenthesis indicate to the reader that Kincaid is aware and conscious of her choices and the impressions she may make upon the reader in imparting a story in a particular way.

Requiring a reader's endurance and patience (as I have mentioned before), the parenthesis can also be used, as Kincaid so deftly does, to recount what has already been said (which is not necessarily self-indulgent but necessary since the sentences- with their commas, semi-colons and parenthesis can be quite lengthy) as Kincaid does through the following: "But there was a moment when in a fury at me for not taking care of her mistakes (my brother with the lump of shit in his diapers, his father who was sick and could not properly support his family, who even when well had made a family that he could not properly support, her mistake in marrying a man so lacking, so lacking)…" (2001, 133) Along with an inventory of sorts of the events, ideas and feelings that has been told, the use of the parenthesis to recount events also allows for an author to, correctly or incorrectly, evaluate and judge a situation as Kincaid does when she determines her step-father was "a man so lacking, so lacking)…"

The emergence, as it were, of the author from the text (even in autobiographical works which is about the author) through the parenthesis takes on even further significance in Kincaid's writings. As established earlier, one of the most subversive and productive elements in Kincaid's body of works is the blurring of fact and fiction, the conflation of the personal and the political, which allows those who have been marginalized and erased from the official discourse of history to have a voice. Talking about the books her mother burned (as punishment for not watching her brother as instructed) regardless of their literary quality, Kincaid writes that: "(I then had no sense of literary quality, literary quality being a luxury, luxury being absent from my existence unless I saw an illustration of what this might be on a tin of cheap powder from England, and this picture of luxury only demonstrated what it might look like if one did not have to work at all, and so luxury was presented as contempt for working and any association with the dullness of the everyday.)" (1997, 132-133) Kincaid reminds us about the relationship between the personal and the historical. By inserting a passage about England in an extended meditation on family and domestic life, the reader is forced to remember the history of conquest and empire in the Caribbean, in Antigua. Quite literally, Kincaid's writings on family and domestic life are interrupted by the mention of England, much like how the history and development of peoples throughout the world were interrupted and retarded by the forces of colonization.

IV

At this point, having established that while autobiography is a democratizing genre that allows those who have been erased by History to enter History (such as

colonized and racialized people), it is necessary to re-evaluate the very term upon which this chapter has focused: autobiography. Rather than using the term autobiography, I am compelled- after reading more and more of Kincaid's magazine articles, essays, short stories, novels and memoirs and writing my own story and reading my own story- to favour the term life-writing. As the story of someone's life, autobiography is the remembering, recollection and retelling of one's life. The cumulative inventory of a person's life is what results in an autobiography. Traditionally, it was only those who had achieved something of "great" importance who could write their autobiographies such as politicians and military leaders. Recently, and with increasing frequency, entertainment celebrities, entrepreneurs and the wealthy have also been the source of autobiographies. In this sense, then, autobiography can be a very elitist and exclusionary genre. In the diaspora, for example, to quantify "achievement" as an action and contribution on the public, societal level is to negate the fact that systemic barriers such as racism have hindered the opportunity of some people to participate- in order to contribute and achieve and thus have legitimacy to write an autobiography and tell a story. I link the term life-writing to the words of Jamaica Kincaid. While her writing draws on the events of her life, thus allowing us to understand them as containing autobiographical elements, Kincaid states that

> What I am writing now is not a journal; a journal is a daily account, an immediate account of what occurs during a certain time. For a long time after my brother died, I could not write about him, I could not think about him in a purposeful way. It was a really short time between the time that he became sick and the time he died, but that time became a world. To make a world takes an eternity, and eternity is the refuge of the lost, the refuge for all things that will never be or things that have been but have lost their course and hope to recede with some grace, and even I believe this to be true, though I also know that I have no real way of measuring it. (1997, 91-92)

By leading us to question how History is experienced by individual people, we are further compelled to re-evaluate how we measure History; what distance, in one sense, do we need from History when we do not know our own or when, for example, we only know one version of History that altogether excludes and erases some people. Based on some type of "end," (and thus, some sort of beginning, some originary moment) the autobiography is in too much collusion with a version of History that excludes and negates certain experiences as much as it compartmentalizes and orders some as victors and others as the defeated.

Life-writing, or writing elements of one's life, on the other hand, is a constitutive element of a final cumulative inventory (that while perhaps reaching, reaching, towards the finality of an autobiography, is nonetheless never truly capable of achieving it; and here lies life-writing's beauty for in never reaching an ending, in never reaching a final and definitive conclusion, in every ending, and in every ending following, in every subsequent and successive ending lies the proof of continuation and survival. And I can hear, now: "what about in death?" Even then, there is no ending, for as we can see in Kincaid, the story of life is intermingled with those of others and the story of one life is always already the story of another). Life-writing, then, is about making something real and conjuring the present. And the present is what matters especially for people who have been left out of History. It is only by focusing on the present that we can articulate our experiences, our lives and our histories and in so doing, make real what is not real, and render visible what has been invisible. Again, Jamaica Kincaid:

> The words I spoke, the thoughts in my head, that was my writing, and I did not need to have come from the people who had long straddled the world, I did not need to come from the people who had imagined and then made real the world in which I lived. That moment became my

> own. In the beginning was my word and my word became the world as I ordered it to be. (2001, 11)

By writing our lives, we can inscribe ourselves into History. Reading Kincaid's magazine articles, essays, short stories, novels and memoirs, we know about her world. We know about Mr. Straffee. We know that, in 1975, her favourite song was "Kung Fu Fighting." We know about Dan Hinckley, Harold and Annie, Helen and Robert Woodworth or Mount Anthony. We know about her world; a world she has made real and compelled us to pay attention to because she has, through her writing, believed them to be important and deserving of such attention. In turn, we, her readers, give them our attention and thus make them real.

Life writing is especially valuable for racialized people. Through life-writing and by writing our life, we provide proof (to ourselves and to others) of our experiences and challenges of living as racialized people in a racist society. The proof of our existence and our humanity that we can achieve through life-writing is especially powerful. Aside from illustrating our lives to others, writing our lives provides proof and evidence of our existence and our humanity to ourselves. In this sense, then, life-writing is the "Attestation" in reverse. Rather than relying exclusively on others to verify our capacity for reason and humanity through our ability to write, we are the ones writing our lives, verifying our capacity for reason and confirming our humanity. Life writing is one way we can give reality and shape to our existence or enunciate our present. "My purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture" suggests Homi Bhabha "is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience." (1994, 178) Life-writing is that very process Bhabha writes about. To counter the being exoticized and marginalized in a

racialized society, we can deploy life-writing as a tool to enunciate our history and our humanity. Perhaps, most importantly, through life writing and by writing our life, by reflecting and thus giving depth and dimension to the realities of our everyday existence, we can locate our lives and ourselves in a continuum between the disembodied, abstract and grand narrative theory of History that usually, excludes and thereby erases, the weight and sentence of history on our lives. Life-writing allows us to locate ourselves within a greater chain linking those who have come before us who have not been able to either tell story or finish their story. As Jamaica Kincaid does for Mr. Potter, by writing our lives, we are, in some small way, continuing the story of Javier and Pablo, the snake-twins, who never got to finish their stories (much less tell their own), and for those who have been killed.

V

So there are those who have been killed. There are many who have been killed. What about those of us who are still alive? Life and living- and telling the stories of those who have passed- then become our task. The question and issue of whose life-story is being told is brought to the fore through Jamaica Kincaid's latest novel, *Mr. Potter*. This novel is especially useful for our purpose because it addresses the issue of who can legitimately think, speak and tell stories. The autobiography is the story of a person's life recollected and narrated by that very same person. The novel is about the life of Roderick Potter, an illiterate taxi-cab driver and Kincaid's biological father, whom she met only once. A haunting and meditative work, much of the novel rests on the role of reading and writing as an act to make real what is not real, what is unknown or what cannot ever

be known- like Roderick Potter's "actual" life. As evidenced through the earlier example of Annie John, writing can re-write History.

> And it was my mother, who had left the house she shared with my father, Mr. Potter, when I was seven months in her womb, who had taught me how to read but did not then tell me that my father could not do so, or that her teaching me how to read, which led to me knowing how to write, was a dagger, so to speak, directed at Mr. Potter, for he lived his life deliberately ignorant of my existence, as if I were in a secret chamber separated from the rest of the world and there world would never know of me, or suspect that I was in the world. And now, I say, "Mr. Potter," but as I say his name, I am reading it also, and so to say his name and to imagine his life at the same time makes him whole and complete, not singular and fragmented, and this is because he is dead and beyond reading and writing and beyond contesting my authority to render him in my own image. (2002, 193)

Through writing, the lives of those who could not tell their story can now be written, told and known.

Indeed, "the sentence of history" need not be so literal and can, as illustrated through the circumstances of Mr. Potter- a daughter telling the life-story of her estranged father- "the sentence of history" can be a concrete task and activity. The "sentence of history" emerges as the weight of colonialism on the lives of individual peoples. This sentence compels some of those History has claimed as its imprisoned to write in order to understand all that has happened. Jamaica Kincaid, as has been illustrated, weaves colonial and national history with issues of family, immigration and labour to articulate the relationship between the "private" and the "public." However we come to Kincaid's works- forcefully conscripted due to a class reading list, acting upon the recommendation of a friend or colleague or by accident- we become her readers. In the reading of her "sentence"- literal and metaphoric- we, her readers, become, in a sense, imprisoned. In reading her "sentence," we face the task of finishing her sentences and reaching the period: the culmination of her thought. In reading her "sentence" and becoming her reader, we are given the responsibility of knowing how she has experienced History. In

the reading of her history, some of us, in turn, are urged and compelled to remember our own and take upon ourselves the task of writing our own sentence. And in our writing, we have enlisted a new group of readers to read our history and thus passing on the task to the reader of remembering their own. From writer to reader, from reader to writer, the story is passed on.

At the same time that life-writing is a valuable tool for countering racist assault and denigration about the humanity of racialized peoples, it is also inadequate insofar that it is neither life nor living but, rather, only a mode in which to observe, reflect and record your life. In order to narrate a completely accurate and authentic story of a person's life, one would have to continuously write and write and write everything, to accurately reflect your life. Such a task, however, would be so time consuming, so laborious and exhausting, that it is highly doubtful one would be able to do much living in order to observe, reflect and write one's life. It is in this sense that writing our lives becomes another "sentence of history."

As Kincaid suggests, writing should not be privileged as the ultimate and definitive claim to making the unknown real; rather, writing- together with thinking and speaking- make the unknown, the unreal, the singular and the fragmented whole and complete. Finally, you, reading this, re-inscribe its reality. It has been thought about, it has been written, it has been spoken, it has been told; it has been read. It is real. Making the unreal known is perhaps the most powerful effect of life-writing. Rather, writing (along with reading, speaking and thinking) is what constitutes a more complete mode of being for racialized people to counter racist assault and denigration and our exclusion from History. Through life-writing, we can have "proof" and "evidence" of who we are,

what we do with our bodies and how we enact our lives. Furthermore, life-writing is proof of one's continued survival in the face of personal challenges and historical oppression. Life-writing is both the symbolic vehicle and concrete method of survival to affirm a racialized individual's humanity and political agency. By providing an account of the everyday and present-day realities of racialized peoples, life-writing further illustrates the dispersal of the "widely scattered historical contingencies" emanating from the history of empire, conquest, subjugation and diaspora. In the context of a race-supremacist society that either ignores or exoticizes the racialized, non-Western individual, life-writing offers an identity that is written about as it changes, with an equal focus on the process as much as the product.

Aside from countering racist assault and denigration that casts doubts and suspicions about our humanity- beginning with our suspicious origins, our mysterious births- life-writing ends that very cycle of suspicion, speculation and the unknown; the mysteries are solved, the empty spaces are filled in. I close with the words of Jamaica Kincaid:

> ...and there is an empty space with a line drawn through it where the name of my father, Roderick Nathaniel Potter, ought to be, for Mr. Potter was my father; my father's name was Roderick Nathaniel Potter. And this line that runs through Mr. Potter and that he then gave to me, I have not given to anyone, I have brought it to an end, I have made it stop with me, for I can now write and I now say, in writing, that this line drawn through the space where the name of the father ought to be has come to an end, and that from Mr. Potter to me, no one after that shall have a line drawn through the space where the name of the father ought to be, and that through him coming through me, everyone after that shall have a father and a mother and so will inherit twofold the great cauldron of misery and small cup of joy that is all of life. (2002, 101)

Life-writing brings forth a thinking, speaking and writing subject whose identity is nonetheless constantly in transition. Life-writing and personal narratives are methods for creating a dynamic diasporic identity that, in the words of Paul Gilroy, is "always

unfinished and always being re-made." (1993, xi) Through life-writing, we can break the "sentence of history" and thus make our own. Writing, and writing our lives, then is a site for saving, making and re-making ourselves. Writing our life allows for a space of distant reflection about what we have lost, whom we have lost and it is a space for making us real. I have survived; I am writing and speaking and telling the stories. Stories are what one survives. Stories, and the life from which they are drawn, will continue long after the end of this page, long after the end of this sentence.

VI

At what point do I find myself in? And where am I? I am not sure how tall my grandfather was. He was bigger than me, he was taller than me. Everything is about distance, everything is about perspective.

One day, at my cousin's house, where her parents were visiting from the Philippines, my uncle, my cousin's father, was looking at me from across my cousin's glass dining room table. "You're so much taller than your grandfather," he said. "He was only *this* high," my uncle said, pointing to his eyebrow. My uncle continued. "You're grandfather was so nice." My mom nodded her head as she picked her fork through a slice of pound cake. My stepfather stared into the distance. My cousin emptied the dishwasher, her two small lap dogs were running around, yapping and squirming; it is, to me, a truly revolting sight: small lap dogs running around, yapping, squirming from their tiny bellies and hips. I wanted to step on them and keep them underfoot. My aunt, from the far end of the kitchen, putting leftovers into the

refrigerator, was nodding her head. I could hear her say "Yes....Yes." "You're grandfather was so nice" said my uncle. Everytime we would come over, he would say to me 'Jun! (that is my uncle's name; it is short for Junior; he is named after his father; I do not know his father's name and I do not know his; I do not know his name and I do not know his father's) I have fresh fish for you!" (The Philippines is an archipelago of 7 100 islands. The Spanish called it "The Pearl of the Orient"; Manila, once the seat of Empire, was known as "The Venice of the Orient" there were so many streams and rivers that opened into the ocean; the ocean divided into so many streams and rivers. Nobody calls the Philippines "The Pearl of the Orient" anymore. Or, rather, some still do but when they do, I want to laugh. Sometimes, I do. Nobody at all, nobody at all, calls Manila "The Venice of the Orient" anymore; of this I am very sure. Actually, *someone* must still call it "The Venice of the Orient" for how else would that phrase have gotten into my mind for me to determine that I dislike it. S*omeone* must still use it.) My uncle let out a big laugh and clapped his hands. "Every time" he continued "he would have fresh fish for us. Jun! I have fresh for you" My uncle let out a big laugh and clapped his hands. The top of my uncle's head reaches my eyebrow. In my head, I imagined the math, I calculated the measurements of bodies not standing to one another and figured: "So" I thought to myself "*that's* how tall my grandfather was."

In that room, in that town in northern Colorado, where (my uncle was just lamenting out loud before his gaze settled on me) the streets are so quiet and so empty (and not just, I thought to myself, because that is the way it is here, here in Colorado, and not just because this is not the Philippines where the streets are always busy and people are always outside) I feel my grandfather in the room. And he is *this* high. My

grandfather would have reached just below my chin. And in that moment, nothing could be more eerie and unnatural and nothing could be more natural and satisfying and at that moment, my grandfather is not so unreachable; he is *this* high.

I did not look up at the sky; we were indoors and when you are entering History, there is a great tendency to forget the most basic of things like ceilings and the dark, December, Colorado sky it covers. This is how I enter History. Any chance I get and by accident, I enter History.

Right now, not far from where I live, though I will no longer live here very soon, is the shore. This is not the shore to the ocean but rather the shore of a strait leading to the ocean. On this shore, there is a concrete pier jutting from the pebbles, rocks and driftwood on the shore to the water. Walking the other day, high tide had come in and water had covered the concrete pier. Perhaps foolishly, it never occurred to me that the concrete pier would be, could be, covered by water. But then again, maybe it is not so foolish on my part because a pier, as I understand it, is a landing for ships and boats. Why would they build a pier that could be, would be covered, by water and prevent the safe landing of ships and boats and their tempest-tossed passengers? Why would they do such a thing? Why would they do such a thing? Who would do such a thing?

Tonight, I returned to the shore. The pier was not completely covered with water like it was the other day though the water had risen to the very sides and brim of the pier it looked like the pier was just floating rather than anchored and borne from the shore. Walking to the pier's edge, it seemed like the longest walk I had ever taken in my life. It is not a long walk. It is not a long pier. It is, maybe, about 30 feet. I have seen much bigger piers: in New York harbour; in Atlantic City; even 30 minutes away from this 30

foot pier is a pier the length of a city block, two city blocks, where tourist cruise ships dock. Nonetheless, I do not know how to swim and this walk, in the dark, on a pier hugged to its brim with water, seemed like the longest walk I had ever taken. I do not know why I walked to its edge.

On the edge, I looked down into water. The water was dark and black. I could hear more than I could see. I got to the edge and I thought about how I could not swim. I wondered how high was the water from the bottom of the water to the top of the pier. I am not very tall and I wondered if the length from the bottom of the water to the top of the pier was taller than I am (and I am not very tall). Looking over the edge into the black water where I could not see my own face, I wondered, if I fell over, if I jumped over, could I stand on the bottom of the water and lift my head above the water to breathe? Could I hold onto the edge of the pier and pull myself out of the water? (My father is also not very tall, I am taller than he is, and I wondered, if he fell over, if he jumped over, could he stand on the bottom of the water and lift his head above the water to breathe? My grandfather was not very tall, my father was taller than he was, and I wondered, if he fell over, if he jumped over, could he stand on the bottom of the water and lift his head above the water to breathe? Like me, neither of them knew how to swim.)

This is a spent point, I think, because it would depend on the time of day I fell over or jumped into the water. If I fell over or jumped over the pier at the peak of high tide, I would not be able to lift my head above water and breathe. And then again, of course, if I fell over or jumped over the pier at the peak of high tide, I would not really have a pier to stand from which I could accidentally fall or purposely jump because it

would already be covered with water. (Why, then, would I walk out to the water, approximating the length of the pier? Would I walk out to the water, approximating the length of the pier?) Which brings me back to my original question. Why then would they build a pier that could be, would be, covered by water and prevent the safe landing of ships and boats and their tempest-tossed passengers? Why would they do such a thing? Why would they do such a thing? *Who* would do such a thing?

And this question, too, like the one asking: would I be able to hold onto the edge of the pier and pull myself out of the water? is a spent and irrelevant question because I do not know how to swim and I need to keep my life. Perhaps I should be thankful that the pier becomes covered with water (which, in my mind, does not make it a pier at all or a very good pier at the very least). Seeing it, over the course of days, and during different times of those days, sometimes not covered with water and sometimes covered with water I could only barely see it, made me realize that some things change at the same time some things never change. Sometimes, the pier is covered with water and sometimes it is not. Above the water or underneath the water, it is still, however, there. What I see is what changes. Everyday, I am changing and everyday I am writing my life and I am writing from where I am standing and whatever I am seeing, day to day to day.

And, today, who knows? Who knows how my face will spread? My never perfect nose with its soft round tip instead of a point: who knows how it will bloom like the small rosebud it never really was? How will my flesh fall away from my bones; how will my skin survive that kind of slack, that sort of demand? Who knows where my body will go, what shape will it take next? When did my body begin to take the shape it has? When did it change from the shape it had? Was I supposed to pay attention? I was

supposed to pay attention? What muscles will tighten with bitterness and use? What mounds of flesh will gracefully soften with defeat, resignation and contentment? How will the fat deposited around my waist burn when my body is in the pyre? Will the fat send sparks into the night sky like the fire flies I used to chase when I was small? Who will chase it? Will I be burned? Will I be burned at night? And when at night? dusk, midnight or that imperceptible in between, like on summer nights when you become oblivious to the dark tongue of night licking, then swallowing, day? And like that, will I, too, know I am being burned; will I feel the heat? Who knows? How will my face cast shadows upon itself? And who knows how my face will be built and re-built new in another face, the face of those sons, *that* son I have been thinking about, I have been writing about, I have been talking about, I have been writing about. Who knows? I do not know how to swim but I am learning how to write and that, for now, is enough. And I have written these words and I am writing these words. *"These are all words, all of them, these words are my own."* (Kincaid 2002, 48)

I claim these things then- mine- and now feel myself grow solid and complete, my name filling up my mouth.

-*At The Bottom of the River*, Jamaica Kincaid

Chapter 5: *"Some point unproven and true"*

I

The only perfect reader I have ever known is my grandfather. He was retired and 63 when I was born and I was his life. A draftsman with Meralco (whom everyone said was smart enough and talented enough to become an architect but could not go to school because his family was so poor and his father always so sick that he had to get a job to support nine brothers and sisters and a sick father) he had the finest penmanship I have ever seen. At ten, I saw The Constitution at *The Smithsonian* and I thought "my grandfather's handwriting is better" and I remember thinking the same thing ("my grandfather's handwriting is better") when I saw a copy of The Magna Carta at *The Royal Albert* when I was thirteen. I learned to read and write when I was four. I lived with him with until I was eight and for four years, he loved everything I made. I remember stealing coins out of his pockets, I remember him using coconut pomade on his hair, I remember the smell of the lighter fluid he used and the soft green, soft packet of the Philip Morris cigarettes he smoked, but I don't remember writing anything for him. He died when he was 78 and tomorrow would have been his 89th birthday. The one and only thing I have from my grandfather is his signature on the back of my Grade 2 report card. *Manuel Raymundo*. I have still not seen a finer or more delicate penmanship than his.

When I was in Manila last summer, a year this month, and my first time back in thirteen years, ten years after my grandfather died, eleven years after I aw him last, I was stunned at the thickness of the heat and the toll it took on the buildings. Everything looked old. The heat peels paint and reveals the gray brick and concrete of which most

the building are made. The only reason I know it is his 89th birthday tomorrow is because I took a picture of his gravestone whose paint, too, is peeling from the heat and the flooding and the disregard of careless family members who live close by but never visit. Walking into the sprawling modernist buildings of the University of the Philippines or the National Library, I wondered if, had my grandfather had the chance, could he have made a better building suitable for the tropical clime? So, I wonder. But I think he would have and the only proof I have from which I base my speculative conclusion is the one and a half inch signature of his from 1984 that, written in pencil, it too is starting to fade.

For those of us who pestered our mothers for music lessons only to fall quickly out of love with the instrument when it did not play, when it did not sing and sound like we imagined it would, like it should, as it did in our heads when we first wanted to so badly more than anything else in the world play an instrument, writing becomes our instrument to tell those stories and play that music and pay back those who gave us our lives us, like the man who could not afford to become an architect and spent his life sharpening pencils to a perfect point with a pocket knife you'd swear it was a real pencil sharpener it was that sharp he had to give his hands something (anything) to do (other than smoking, shadowboxing and combing his grandson's hair to a perfect part) or the beautiful woman with the straight black hair who washed white people's behinds and walked their bichons frises at 6 in the morning through Central Park (do you know how dangerous that is?) to pay for those $5-an-hour guitar lessons for her eager son who stopped practicing somewhere between "Camp Town Races" and "The Yellow Rose of

Texas" who is now writing this remembrance, this commemoration, this apology, this thank you.

I am trying, however futile an endeavour it may be, to re-build and re-paint those buildings that should never have been made the way they were made for the places they were built in and for the people for which they should have been built. I grew up in an extended and intergenerational household. I lived with my mother and father, my grandmother and her sister who told me stories and my grandfather. My grandfather built me a home but he did not own his house own house. One day, we were evicted from the house he did not own but which he turned into a home. I am always afraid of being asked to leave. I am afraid of being left but I am more afraid of being asked to leave. I turn to the words of African-American woman poet and former US Poet Laureate, Rita Dove:

> I prove a theorem and the house expands:
> the windows jerk free to hover near the ceiling,
> the ceiling floats away with a sigh.
>
> As the walls clear themselves of everything
> but transparency, the scent of carnations
> leaves with them. I am out in the open
>
> And above the windows have hinged into butterflies,
> sunlight glinting where they've intersected.
> They are going to some point unproven and true.

And I am trying to imagine how my grandfather could have built them, would have built them, had someone not landed somewhere and declared it for someone else, had someone not decided they owned someone else, had History not worked out the way it did but instead worked out a little differently. I am trying to write a story from places I don't quite belong but these are places I know I have to be. I am trying to build a house and make a home with enough rooms for everyone. I am trying to build a house and make a

home for my mother and my father, my grandmother and her sister and my grandfather. I am trying to build a room for all of them in the houses I now occupy. I live in different places because when I am asked to leave, I will always have a place to go.

I am reminded of the words of the poet, playwright, journalist, academic and activist Amiri Baraka from his poem "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note" written for the birth of his daughter Kellie: "And now, each nigh I count the stars, And each night, I get the same number. And when they will not come to be counted, I count the holes they leave." (Baraka 1991, 3) My grandfather has, wrongly or rightly, become an altar upon which I bow in daily gratitude and desperation; an altar that is no longer holy because it is an altar upon which I bow in daily gratitude and desperation; an altar that is holy precisely because it is an altar upon which I bow in daily gratitude and desperation.

Everyday, I think of my grandfather. And each time, I get the same stories: taking afternoon naps with him, waking up, him combing my hair, walking to the bakery for fresh bread where he would run into one of his friends, stealing coins from his pockets, how he smoked Philip Morris cigarettes wrapped in textured gold paper in a beautiful soft-green pouch, how he liked pork and how he liked boxing even more than cigarettes and pork, standing outside the window of my nursery school classroom for three straight months (in heat and in rain) I could not be without him.

These are the stories I know about my grandfather and these stories are how I know myself then, when I was younger, in the past. These days, I ask my mother: "What stories do you remember?" She brings up one story about how, on Friday nights, my grandfather's friend would come over for coffee. They would chat and laugh,

drinking their coffee on our small porch. I do not remember this story. I do not know who this man is. I do not remember this story at all and I am quick to anger.

These days, I ask my mother: "What stories do you remember?" And she tells me about the afternoon naps with him, waking up, my grandfather combing my hair…she tells me the stories I know and remember and I am quick to anger. Why is there nothing new? (My mother does not know that we would often run into my grandfather's friends at the bakery; my mother does not know about how I stole coins from my grandfather's pockets and then stole US dollar bills, that she had remitted from New Jersey, in America, and how I would, at seven, go to the bank, by myself, and change them into pesos; my mother does not know, or she never mentions by name, the cigarettes my grandfather smoked and the colour and feel of the package in which they were wrapped; though I think she knows, my mother never mentions how my grandfather liked pork and how he liked boxing even more than cigarettes and pork; my mother does know, and she tells me, how my grandfather stood outside the window of my nursery classroom for three straight months in heat and in rain That is some kind of devotion! My mother knows; my mother does not know. We do not, always, know the same thing.)

(Aside from the story about the man coming over on Friday nights for coffee with my grandfather, a story I cannot ever recall that I am quickened to anger at my own inability and shortcoming and the futility of the whole exercise, my mother tells me another story, or rather a memory she has of me and my grandfather. "I would come home from work and see you next to your grandfather, or I would walk into the kitchen while your grandfather was washing dishes, and you were next to your grandfather, and the two of you were talking softly, the two of you were always talking to each other and I

thought to myself "What could they be talking about? What could they be talking about?" What were we talking about? Indeed, what could a 68-year-old man and a five year old boy talk about? What were we talking about? Many things, I think, many things. My mother has given me this picture in my head: Her coming home from work and finding me next to my grandfather or her walking into the kitchen while my grandfather washed dishes, me next to my grandfather, and the two of us, my grandfather and I, talking softly, me looking up at my grandfather, my grandfather looking at the top of my head, my long eyelashes, the two of us talking, talking, talking like we were old friends. For the longest time, I viewed everything peering from behind my grandfather's legs, his finely tailored gray pants; I viewed everything from behind my grandfather's wrist, his deep dark, coconut husk coloured skin.)

Now, I search my mind deeper and further back, and then even further than that, and I cannot recall anything "new" and in place of recalling anything new, I make things up. And one day I will have made up so many things it will be enough to fill a book. Nonetheless, I write with my grandfather occupying a space of my mind, because, I am, at 25, forgetting him and I could not, do not want, to imagine living another fifty years without him. I would not feel so "new" or even "recent."

II

Born in Manila, I was raised in Jersey City and Spanish Harlem. For junior high, I attended the Manhattan East School on East 99tth and I took Saturday morning classes on social studies at the Trinity School on West 91st. My father, an electrical engineer in the Philippines, was the driver for the Sri Lankan ambassador to the UN. My mother, a

high school biology teacher and nurse- also in the Philippines- worked graveyard shifts as a Nurse's Aide at Mother Cabrini and cleaned Park Avenue apartments during the day. She always worked weekends. I remember rainy Wednesday morning trips- on my mother's day off- to the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney. Thinking of riding the PATH Train from Journal Square to the East 33rd St. station- passing Pavonia, Newport, Grove, Christopher, East 14th, East 23rd (if I am remembering correctly)- still fills me with this quiet and delicious dread. My most vivid memory of New York was the time my mother bought me my first dictionary from the Woolworth's on East 34th and 3rd. I am not sure if the Woolworth's is still there (it could also have been a Duane Reed's) but I still have the dictionary. A *Webster's New World Dictionary: Modern Desk Edition* in dark green, fake leather, I wrote my full name- *Jose Emmanuel Raymundo*- in script using pencil and traced over it with a fine tipped, dark blue ink pen. I never finished putting my whole name in ink- I was called away to do something I now cannot remember- and today, sixteen years later, half my name is still in pencil and the other half is still in ink. Interrupted, unfinished, frozen, half-realized, still containing the possible- to be erased or to be written over: this is my most valuable possession.

My penmanship (then and now, especially now) is not nearly as ornate, delicate and fine as my grandfather's. Despite 2 hours of penmanship classes from kindergarten to Grade 2, where we linked *o*'s on ruled and lined paper and linked *e*'s to look like the wire borders of flowerbeds, my penmanship is not nearly as ornate, delicate and fine as my grandfather's. I used to write with a pencil, then a pen, with such force, with such intention and with such concentration, there was always a small bump of hardened,

folded skin on the top third of my right middle finger where my pencil, then my pen, was pushed against by my thumb and forefinger. I do not write with either a pen or a pencil as much as I used to. My once fine penmanship, though never as ornate, delicate and fine as my grandfather's, is a melting pool of scribble that perhaps no one would guess that I spent 2 hours everyday from kindergarten to Grade 2 in a Catholic convent-school where we learned discipline and order and practiced our penmanship for 2 hours a day everyday. I no longer have that small bump of hardened, folded skin that reminded me: "I write." Where did that bump go? How do I harden and fold the skin on my finger again? How do I write something intelligible and legible? Who will be able to read it?

III

I learned how to read when I was four; my mother read me stories (*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*). I learned to write when I was five; my nursery school teacher taught us how to print our names (*Jose Emmanuel Raymundo*). My grandfather did not teach me to read or write. So used was I to being around my grandfather (and, I like to think, so used was he to being around me) that I would not go to school without him. For the first three months of nursery school, he stood by the window of my classroom. One arm leaning over the shaped wrought iron red bars into the classroom, the other arm down behind his hip holding a cigarette (a Philip Morris Menthol), my grandfather looked at me and I looked at him. So used I was I and so insistent was I to having him around, he would tell my teacher when he was going to the bathroom or buying another pack of cigarettes., He was the only man amongst the mothers, the sisters, the nannies

and maids who waited for their own children. I wonder what he talked to them about. He was able to stop standing outside (in rain and in sun) when I learned how to write (to match my reading); I had something new to play with. My grandfather did not teach me how to read (my mother did that). My grandfather did not teach me how to write (my nursery school teacher did that). My grandfather may or may not have been the perfect reader of which every writer dreams but he was there when I learned how to read and he was there when I learned to write. He did not teach me how to read (my mother did that). He did not teach me how to write (my nursery school teacher did that). Now that I can read and now that I can write, I can only write about him and read back to myself what I have written about him. Now that I can read and now that he can write, he is not here but he is here.

IV

This thesis was developed from a life altering, indeed life-affirming, research trip to the Philippines in the summer of 2001. This thesis and my work- along with myself, who I am- would not have been the same without that experience. The actual writing of this thesis, for whatever its significance, formally began on Easter Sunday of 2002. My friend Kemi and I went to church and then we went to brunch where we ate asparagus and mushroom eggs benedict with rosemary potatoes and cups and cups of strong Italian coffee. I finished this thesis on the longest day of the year. I will work on this some more but I will always remember finishing this on the first day of summer, on the longest

day of the year. (My hair is long and the sun is shining and I can feel the blackness of my hair. It is very black.) I finished this thesis on the longest day of the year.

Thank you to Dr. Warren Magnusson for supervising my work.

I thank my friends: Liz Philipose, Shannon Bell, Alanna Kraayeveld, Andrew K. Baxter, Rob Parker, Anne Caulfield, Erin Richmond, Gresham Smith, Meaghan Shute Karina Vernon, Kemi Craig.

I am grateful to my very good friend Martin French without whom this thesis would not have completed. While I was in Colorado, Martin patiently acted as a liaison on my behalf with my committee- dutifully printing, photocopying and hand-delivering copies of my thesis. I am infinitely grateful to you for your unconditional and unwavering encouragement and friendship.

I listened to lots of people when I was writing this. From where I was, I heard Jaguar Wright, singing- declaring- "self LOVE SELF preservation" the hottest and the loudest. Thank you so much for reminding me. Self love, self preservation.

I thank my friend Drew Johnson without whose presence I could not have begun to write. With you, I felt loss. I look forward to seeing you again.

I thank my friend Scott Lynch. I love my friend Scott Lynch. I love him much in the same way I love my friend Drew Johnson. Though they have never met each other, Scott reminds me of Drew and Drew reminds me of Scott. I knew of Scott around the winter of 1997. We were undergraduate university students living in residence; I lived on the third floor, he lived on the fifth and we had nothing to do with each other save the occasional and passing "hello" in hallways and doorways. One Thursday night, a group of my friends, all of whom I have since lost touch with, were in

the room of a girl who used to be a good friend but whom I have since lost touch with and who has lost touch with me. Passing by her room on his way to somewhere, she invited Scott in. He said "hello" and he left. "That was Scott Lynch," said my girlfriend, "He lives on the fifth floor."

Scott and I met each other, again, in September of 1999, on the day senior undergraduate students helped first year students move into residence. We met in the lobby of the residence building, in front of the porter's station. A girl that was enrolled in the same program in which I was a student (Public Policy and Administration) and with whom I had been in a class with (Organization and Administration) introduced us. Bending over to tape some boxes, she looked up and said "Scott this is Emmanuel. Emmanuel, Scott." "Hi, I'm Scott." Scott extended his hand to me and I shook it as I said "Hey- hi. I'm Emmanuel." Without explanation, we started talking about novels and authors- in a strange and funny accent we thought was British but which is really our very own strange accent. We have been friends ever since. And still we talk about novels and authors, politics and hockey (sometimes with our accent, sometimes without.)

During the last month of writing this thesis, I spoke to Scott often. We spoke almost everyday; sometimes, we spoke two, three or four times in one day. (Of this, I have proof: my phone bill; of this, he has proof: his phone bill.) I do not exactly know why it was important to talk with Scott almost everyday (sometimes, two, three, or four times a day) but I am very sure it was important. The last night of May, a Friday, a cool and breezy night where the sun did not set until 9:12 pm, I spoke to Scott as I ate Chinese food and did laundry. I had just vacuumed my apartment. Scott had just returned from soccer- (he plays soccer in a summer intramural league); he had just received a package

of coffee I sent him from my recent trip to Salt Spring Island (a place to which he has never been but which I know he would like very, very much had I the money I would fly him in and we would have coffee there, together). He called to say "hello" and "thank you." I thank you for your contributions to this work.

Moving to the other side of the country, to its very edge, writing this thesis, telling these stories, my brother Nick, even from so far away, was *always* on my mind. Probably more than anyone else, telling these stories is for you. I'm going to spend my lifetime telling stories so that one day, maybe, I hope, you'll be able to tell yours. I'm going to listen.

I am the grandson of Manuel Raymundo. My name is Jose Emmanuel Raymundo. I use to dislike my name. Then I was taken to America and I hated my name. I like my name now.

I am choosing to not say "goodbye" because you gave me so much love and so much affection that there is no other choice than to remember that love, to remember you, and to pass it on, to pass you on- everyday and with everyone.

I have made it real; I am making it real.

V

I finished this thesis in my mother's home in Colorado. At 52, this house is the first house she has ever owned; she has built many homes, she has cleaned many homes, she has made the beds in many homes, she has washed the windows in many homes, she has scrubbed the toilets in many homes and she has opened and closed the doors of many homes, but she has never owned any of them. I am in debt to my mother for so many things, the least of which was the food and shelter she provided that allowed me to finish this work.

Behind me, in this house, the first home my mother has ever owned, are the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The Rocky Mountains, stretching half the length of the continent and the unseen border of two separate countries, are, geologically young (though much older than the unseen border of the two separate countries they now straddle). Two million years old in comparison to their quiet, soft-topped relatives in the east- the Appalachians, the Berkshires, which are at least 25 million years old- the Rockies exude the arrogance and confidence, the blinding sheen, the paralyzing beauty of youth. When I step outside of the front door of my mother's home, the first home she has ever owned, I look out and see the skeletal frames of new houses being built in the distance; I look out and see the plains sloping towards "Nebraska," (and I think, How did I ever learn how to say such a word, Nebraska?); I can imagine New York City, its skyscrapers scratching the sky like stalactites, the black waters of the Atlantic, that small house in San Nicolas, Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines that is no longer there but, certainly at one time, once was there, across the prized Pacific, the Great Waters, until I

come over the shoulders and peaks of the Rockies, slide down the foothills and stand in the back door of my mother's home (the first home she has ever owned), and I am watching her, wiping her small, wet hands on a kitchen towel, watching me look out the front door until she breaks our obliviousness to each other and she tells me, softly (with a smiling tone to her voice she is so happy she and her sons, including the one standing outside the door looking at who knows what he's *always* looking at something, survived), "Come in."

VI

I lived in a house of death. When I think of home, I often think of death. It wasn't always a house of death. One time, it was just an extended and intergenerational household. Along with my mother and father, there was my grandmother, her sister, my grandfather and a revolving door of aunts and uncles and cousins. I grew up in a house of death. It was not always a house of death. It was also filled with life. It is still alive.

This is for me

This is for Manuel

This is for Leonore

This is for Nita

This is for Efren

This is for Pilar

This is for Nicholas

This is for all those who have been killed

This is unfinished

Epilogue[8]

Elated at the news of an expedition's recent conquest, the King commissioned the Friar, his most skilled cartographer, to make a map- a map picturing the new borders of the kingdom, which, because of the expedition's recent conquest, was almost the entire world. The Friar went to his study, drew a map and presented it to the King. The King rejected it; he wanted a map that was more accurate. The Friar returned to his study, drew a larger map and presented it to the King who rejected it once again; he wanted a map that was more accurate. The Friar returned to his study, drew an even larger map and presented it to the King who rejected it once again; he wanted a map that was more accurate. This went on and on, back and forth between the King and the Friar, the Friar and his study, the Friar to the King, until the Friar made a map so accurate, so precise, it covered the entire world. The Friar made a map so accurate, so precise, so large, it covered everything- including the King, the Friar and the new boundaries of the kingdom (which, because of the expedition's recent conquest, was almost the entire world.) The King was gloriously blissful. The King's glorious bliss, however, did not last. Soon after receiving the map, the King died- as did the Friar and everyone else in the kingdom (which, because of the expedition's recent conquest, was almost the entire world). Almost everyone died. They suffocated under the weight of that parchment, that lambskin paper, that tarp, that accurate map.

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[8] I thank Dr. Scott Westrem, Chair of the Graduate Program in English at The Graduate Centre of the City University of New York, for discussing this story with me in patient epistolary length.

"The last shall be first and the first last."

-*The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon

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Appendix

"His geography." (Oondatje 1976, 8)

36 M.H. Del Pilar, Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines

A house behind another house on the street behind M.H Del Pilar, Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines

Apartment #-, 380 Pavonia Street, Jersey City, New Jersey 07---

Apartment #-, 423 Hoboken Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey 07306

My mother's friend's apartment, Brooklyn, NY -----

Apartment #-, 500 East 119th Street, New York, NY -----

876 Southgate Drive, Oshawa, Ontario L1- ---

12 Keys Avenue, Ajax, Ontario L1T 3R1

Apartment #1110, 77 Falby Court, Ajax, Ontario L1S 4G7

312 Tatham Hall, 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario M3J 1P3

308 Tatham Hall, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3

1-225 Elkhorn Drive, Toronto, Ontario M2K 1J4

7-2C Calumet, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3

508 Tatham Hall, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3

2-- Vanier College Residence, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3

1111 Collinson Street, Victoria, British Columbia, V-- ---

4-305 Linden Avenue, Victoria, British Columbia V8V 4E8

317-1345 Pandora Avenue, Victoria, British Columbia V-- ---

Colorado (I know where I live now but I will not include this here because I know that this work will be stored for public access in a library and my father, though he never goes to the library, any library, may find this and discover where my mother lives and she is still, rightfully, fearful of him and he is not beyond committing mad and crazy things.)

21-313 Crown Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511

VITA

Surname: Raymundo Given Names: Jose Emmanuel

Place of Birth: Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	2000-2002
York University	1995-2000

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Specialized Honours)	York University	2000

Honours and Awards:

Yale University Doctoral Fellowship	2002-2008
University of Victoria Fellowship	2000-2002

Publications:

"Bringing Myself Back To Life: Reflections on Death, Life and Dadang Christanto's 'For those who have been killed.'" *Indonesia and the Malay World.* School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. (Forthcoming 2002).

"Strict, lah, is good: Examining the Politics of ESL." *Standards: The International Journal for Multicultural Studies.* 8:1 (Forthcoming Summer-Fall 2002).

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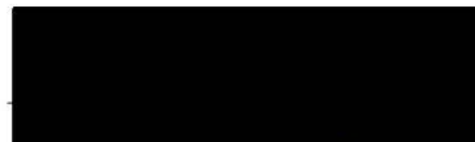
Author



Jose Emmanuel Raymundo

August 8, 2002

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