

SUBVERSIVE SEXUALITIES IN THE FICTION OF SHYAM SELVADURAI

SUBVERSIVE SEXUALITIES IN THE FICTION OF
SHYAM SELVADURAI

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Abstract

In producing texts which implicitly critique overlapping matrices of power, Shyam Selvadurai has made a vital contribution to the field of Canadian literature by writing *Funny Boy* (1994) and *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998). “Subversive Sexualities in the Fiction of Shyam Selvadurai” attends to the way these texts demand thoughtful and sensitive readings by evading oversimplified sexual, national, and ethnic categorizations. As its title indicates, this project recognizes the axis of sexuality as foremost among, though never isolated from, the multiple intersecting cultural constructions of identity in Selvadurai’s novels.

Though Selvadurai’s texts were written and first published in Canada, a discussion of these texts as “Canadian” is complicated by the fact that Canada appears only briefly in *Funny Boy* and does not appear at all in *Cinnamon Gardens*. Nonetheless, this project contends that the various levels of meaning in Selvadurai’s texts are best understood when they are considered in a diasporic frame. Thus, while the first chapter explores characters’ local, familial situations without considering broader cultural context and the second chapter emphasizes Sri Lankan national cultural context, these studies contribute to an overall reading of Selvadurai’s texts – crystallized in the third chapter – as Canadian diasporic articulations. While criticism of Selvadurai’s texts has been published internationally, “Subversive Sexualities in the Fiction of Shyam Selvadurai” is unique in its recognition of the underlying importance of the texts’ “Canadian-ness” as well as the tangible, dramatic impact that his texts have had in his country-of-origin as a result of this textual production.

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Table of Contents

● Introduction1
● Chapter 1: Performing “Funny” in the Fiction of Shyam Selvadurai15
● Chapter 2: Nations Unsettled: Critiques of Nationalisms and the State in Selvadurai’s Fiction48
● Chapter 3: Mapping Diasporic Sexualities in <i>Funny Boy</i> and <i>Cinnamon Gardens</i>83
● Conclusion122
● Bibliography127

INTRODUCTION

The first shining opportunity I had to meet Shyam Selvadurai, I missed. For reasons I cannot now remember and – especially after having spent a year studying his fiction – can certainly not imagine, I was “busy” the day I was invited to accompany this writer to dinner.

The invitation did not come from Selvadurai himself. Studying in my final year as an undergraduate at St. Jerome’s University at the University of Waterloo, I had the distinct pleasure of helping Dr. Gary Draper run the freshly-revived St. Jerome’s Canadian Writers Reading Series. My role in the Series was less than glamorous, but never a reading took place that did not showcase my handiwork: I am still filled with only marginally-ironic pride when I reflect on endless tidy rows of chairs, strong fresh coffee, and nicely-arranged cookie platters (often featuring both chocolate and vanilla cream biscuits). While the atmosphere-creating tasks lacked in prestige, they did not lack in recognition. The readings usually took place in the late afternoons, and in thanks for my eager contribution, Gary never failed to invite me along for the dinners which inevitably followed. Over the course of several such suppers, I had delicious discussions about Greek sausage with André Alexis and Catherine Bush, was appraised as “lucky” by Wayson Choy, and was taught how to craft superior paper airplanes by Don McKay. What might I have learned from Selvadurai had I not been otherwise engaged on the day that he came to read at St. Jerome’s, what unusual little insights I might have gleaned, I will never know.

My introduction to Selvadurai’s work thus did not come through in-class exercises on rigorous textual analysis. Though I missed the reading, Gary told me how wonderful it

had been, and, as a consolation for my having missed it, presented me with a copy of Selvadurai's freshly-published *Cinnamon Gardens*. After reading Selvadurai's second book and hearing Gary's testimony, my sense of regret was only deepened when I visited McMaster University and learned that Selvadurai had recently presented a reading there, too. I met Dr. Daniel Coleman, who would later become my advisor on this project and who passionately echoed Gary's praise of both Selvadurai's writing and story-telling skills. Filled with questions following my reading of *Cinnamon Gardens*, I had again missed a chance to talk with Shyam Selvadurai. Perhaps Wayson Choy was right, however, and I am lucky. For the longer that these questions, initially only small curiosities, went unanswered, the more pressing they became. I was nagged by innocent readerly concerns: why doesn't the word "homosexual" ever appear in either *Funny Boy* or *Cinnamon Gardens*, despite the texts' complex portrayals of gay characters? Does *Funny Boy*'s Arjie's queerness come from the way he likes to play "dress-up" with his girl cousins as a child or from the same-sex desire he grows into as a teenager? How is *Cinnamon Gardens*, a book set totally in the political scramble of late-1920's Ceylon, a Canadian literary text? I might have had these questions answered in conversation over appetizers, but that opportunity was lost. Though I still regret missing Selvadurai's readings, this thesis has given me the chance to attend to some of those questions; to address them in this forum, moreover, allows me to venture into far greater depth than supper with Selvadurai would ever have allowed.

The significance of Selvadurai's work to the field of Canadian literature extends, of course, far beyond delectable dinner conversation. As the title of my thesis asserts, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens* deserve ample critical attention because of the penetrating questions they persistently raise about Canadian literary canonicity and culture-at-large. Along one front, the one which clearly guides the interests of this study, Selvadurai's texts demand reconsideration of the way non-normative sexualities have the power to disrupt the assumed dominance of heterosexuality in our culture. I am not suggesting that every novel featuring homosexual characters promises social upheaval, but novels such as *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens* which deliberately emphasize the painstaking difficulties of growing into homosexual self-understanding present a challenge to Canadian cultural and literary norms. As Peter Dickinson points out in *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada*, "In the emerging narrative surrounding the canonization of Canadian literature . . . the discourse of (homo)sexuality, and its role (or non-role) in the formation and organization of a literary tradition in this country, is virtually non-existent" (4). A major aspect of Dickinson's project is his effort to remedy this problem by "seeking to uncover, or 'bring out'" queer threads in conventional canonical texts through the "rereading of 'old' voices in 'new' ways" (3, 29). While this approach is crucial for Canadian literature in that it establishes a sense of precedence for contemporary writers, Selvadurai's work insists on criticism which directly confronts the systems of power and ways of knowing that discriminate against non-mainstream sexualities.

At the same time that it raises questions about constructions of sexuality, Selvadurai's writing also calls for criticism which attends to voices which are "othered" in Canada because of ethnic and racial differences. As I explain briefly at a later point in this

introduction and at great length throughout the whole of my second chapter, a consideration of Selvadurai's engagement with Sri Lankan culture and politics in his texts is of eminent importance to analysis of those texts. Nonetheless, the act of critically recognizing Selvadurai as a member of the distinguished South Asian Canadian writerly diaspora – instead of as a Sri Lankan writer – yields the most far-reaching insight into his texts. While much of the diaspora theory which I engage in my third chapter is not specific to Canada, a recognition of Selvadurai's Canadian location allows his work to resonate amongst Canada's strong South Asian Canadian writerly community. William New draws attention to the special place of South Asian writing in the Canadian literary landscape in "Papayas and Red River Cereal," the introduction to a special South Asian issue of *Canadian Literature*. He writes that, given the extensive history of South Asian writing in Canada throughout the twentieth century, the critical attention now being paid to South Asian diasporic writers is "less surprising than that it should have taken so long [to develop]" (4). The strength and stability of this writerly community is also evidenced by the presence of the Toronto South Asian Review (TSAR), a publishing house which produces literature, literary theory, and cultural criticism. The firmness of TSAR's presence is, in turn, evidenced by the fact that it began as a small literary journal – the journal which first published Selvadurai's "Pigs Can't Fly" – before using the momentum of its success to evolve into a more substantial organization. Because of the high quality of work produced by South Asian Canadian writers and the popular recognition which that work enjoys, Selvadurai's writing should be studied for the contribution which it makes to the many different perspectives represented in South Asian Canadian literature. It is beyond the scope of this project to extensively compare Selvadurai's works to the works of other South Asian Canadian literary texts, but because his work deals uniquely with

overlapping heteronormative, national, and diasporic issues, his contributions to Canadian literature from his diasporic position must be critically recognized.

The underlying questions driving this project inspired me to create three overlapping chapters which deal with representations of sexual and cultural displacement in Selvadurai's texts from different, but complementary, critical perspectives. Temporarily suspending a broader cultural context, the first chapter considers the performative identity-essentialist identity tensions which complicate Selvadurai's characters' struggles as they negotiate their queerness. The second chapter attends to the subversive charge which the texts carry for a Sri Lankan readership as it explores the way characters' non-normative identities and sexual experiences militate against a distinctly heterosexist national consciousness and violently essentialized ethnic-national identities. The third chapter focuses on Selvadurai's writerly position as a member of the South Asian diaspora in Canada, a position which allows his texts to be read critically against the premises of transnational and universalizing queer theory. While the chapters do not progress smoothly towards a single analytical conclusion, the layout of the chapters ensures that they develop into one another: the project begins as a close study of the characters' immediate environments, opens up to take into account the cultural context of plot events as it considers conformative pressures originating at the national level, and then examines the subtextual diasporic position from which the texts are written. At a very broad level, the layout of the chapters in this thesis thus retains the trajectory of ideas which originally inspired this project. At the same time, the relationships

between one section and the next also reflect my own ongoing critical development in the fields of queer theory and postcolonial studies, both relatively new areas for me. As I became focused on the research and writing of each chapter, I learned what questions, even if already approached in one chapter, demanded to be reconsidered through other critical perspectives to generate fresh understandings of the nuances in Selvadurai's writing.

My first chapter draws on the performative theories of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" to offer an interlaced theoretical approach that addresses complex character positions which are complicated by overlapping networks of power. As this is the opening step in my analysis of *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, I delay my discussion of the texts' larger cultural contexts – how they speak to Sri Lankan nationalism and South Asian Canadian diasporas – and focus instead on the characters' local situations. Though I refrain from analyzing the specifics of larger-scale politics in my first chapter, I do introduce the logic for later evaluations of these political contexts by discussing how queer identities are generated and contained through intricate relationships between various discourses. Butler, building on the insights of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, argues that identity – particularly gender identity – is performative, not a stable, essential core (136). A person's cultural intelligibility, Butler argues, is to be found in the way he or she repeatedly behaves, usually without conscious intent, in response to overlapping social pressures; this behaviour is performed as a response to discursive injunctions which demand that a person act according to one cluster of gender codes if he is biologically male or according to another set of codes if she is biologically female (145). These injunctions, though multiple and varied, generally overlap to sustain a heteronormative organization of culture. Butler describes "the heterosexual matrix," or,

“relations of coherence among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire” that are characterized by a heterosexual organizing principle (17). While Butler focuses extensively on gender as opposed to sexuality, she writes in the interest of freeing alternative sexualities from systematic disempowerment as well as in the interest of enabling gender fluidity.

Though his text does not engage discussions of gender or sexuality, Bhabha, in “Of Mimicry and Man,” explores a theoretical model which resonates with Butler’s work. By approaching comparable questions of power and subversion from within the politics of postcolonial oppression and resistance, Bhabha’s study of “the mimic man” provides an alternative cultural situation that parallels Butler’s argument. Bhabha discusses mimicry as a colonial strategy of power: by enlisting colonized peoples as agents of colonial power – for example as translators and government agents – colonizers seek to absorb and contain threats of anticolonial resistance (85). Just as non-normative genders and sexualities are only intelligible as disruptive exceptions in Butler’s theory of the heterosexual matrix, the mimic man is only intelligible to the colonizer as “a subject of difference” that is “*almost* the same, but not quite” (86). The inevitable slippage of mimicked identities ensures that the colonial mimic man, in his racialized difference, can never fully embody white, European identities and can, therefore, never fully appropriate power in a colonial setting. At the same time, a system which grants power on the basis of performed identities is always threatened by its reliance upon performativity. Mimicked identities carry a menacing charge when, in performances which are too accurate, “the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (89). Power regimes which rely on performative identities thus run the risk of being interrupted by the “strategic production of conflictual . . . ‘identity effects’ in the play of a power that is

elusive because it hides no essence, no ‘itself’” (90). By interweaving Bhabha and Butler’s approaches, I hope to draw attention to the way that different identities are seized and redeployed through different discourses in Selvadurai’s fiction as characters redirect and, at times, usurp oppressive regimes. I elaborate upon this point in my ensuing chapters when I discuss questions of identity in relation to national and diasporic pressures.

Going into my second chapter as I developed this thesis, I initially expected to provide background context about the Sri Lankan and Canadian nations and their complicity in or resistance to heterosexist attitudes and practices. As my research progressed, however, my attention in this phase of my study became focused on the innumerable, subtle ways in which Selvadurai’s portrayals of heterosexist discrimination are intertwined with his portrayals of ethnic and national identities. While neglectful of Selvadurai’s Canadian position, then, my total focus on Sri Lanka in this chapter is not completely irresponsible: it remains in tune with the novels’ plot content, Selvadurai’s writing process, and the writerly intent Selvadurai expresses in interviews. In the first place, aside from a few moments accessed through characters’ memories in *Cinnamon Gardens* and the narrator’s side comments in *Funny Boy*, all of the texts’ events take place in Sri Lanka. Secondly – although I did not have the pleasure of hearing the accounts first-hand – I was told by those who did enjoy Selvadurai’s *Cinnamon Gardens* readings that while his books were first published in Canada, Selvadurai returned to Sri Lanka to conduct research and immerse himself in Sri Lankan culture while writing both of his novels. Finally, Selvadurai states in “The Personal is Political,” an interview with Jim Marks, that he had imagined Sri Lankans to be his target readership while writing *Funny Boy*. Discussing the complications of representing the factors leading up to the Tamil-Sinhalese violence of 1983, he says, “The reasons behind the

violence are difficult to understand. I knew that I was writing for Sri Lankans; non-Sri Lankans would have to take it as it is” (Marks). On a similar note, Jamie James reports in “The Toronto Circle” that Selvadurai has said “that *Cinnamon Gardens* was written with a Sri Lankan readership in mind.” While my second chapter’s focus on the Sri Lankan nation thus eclipses the Canadian context in which Selvadurai’s novels are produced and received, it is not without good reason; in addition, the cluster of questions unanswered in this occlusion provides the focus for my third chapter.

My second chapter begins with an overview of contemporary Sri Lankan culture which explores how the nation – in the spheres of official state power and hegemonic national consciousness – is a direct source of heterosexism in Sri Lanka. While this type of work is invaluable in sketching out the cultural context to which Selvadurai’s texts are responding, the novels themselves portray much more subtle convergences of heterosexist and nationalist social injunctions and exclusions. For example, Selvadurai does not mention Section 365A of Sri Lanka’s penal code, the section forbidding homosexual acts, in either text. Instead, he concentrates on representing the processes by which “the nation” is imagined and the violent types of reasoning which stem from overzealous nationalist identifications.

Though nation-states, representing the highest level of sovereign, communal organization, can seem impervious to critical scrutiny, Benedict Anderson makes such scrutiny possible when he asserts simply in *Imagined Communities* that nations, despite the grand, tangible power of some nation-states, are imagined (6). Working from this principle of imagination, Partha Chatterjee explores in “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” and *The Nation and Its Fragments* the way that “third world,” anticolonial nations

develop as imaginative responses to Western, colonial influence. Using the histories of South Asian countries such as Bengal and India as examples in “Resolution,” he theorizes that many anticolonial nations developed in a dialectic generated between the adoption of a Western, performative, colonial, masculine method of statecraft and the popular cultivation of an Eastern, essentialized, domestic, feminine mode of “native” culture (238). My introduction of this argument extends the ideas from my first chapter in a few ways. For example, Chatterjee’s emphasis on the imaginative aspect of national development harmonizes with Butler’s exposure of seemingly stable, naturalized cultural forms as the ongoing result of a creative discursive process. My second chapter also continues to discuss identity as a result of interaction between performative behaviour and internal motivation. I should note, however, that possible complications may arise in my transition from chapter one to chapter two because, in invoking Chatterjee’s theories of national development, some of the terms which I use to address gendered and sexualized identity in my first chapter – specifically, in my discussion of the tension between identity that is recognized as performative and identity that is perceived as essential and “true” – are used in a different relation to issues clustering around homosexuality. Whereas I use these terms in my first chapter to analyze the emergence and negotiation of characters’ homosexual identities, Chatterjee uses the tension evoked by these terms to describe the dialectic by which anticolonial nations developed “identities” during the colonial era and in its wake.

In carrying over this language from a discussion of “the homosexual” to a discussion of “the nation,” I am not suggesting any kind of symbolic or metaphorical relationship between nascent sexuality and nascent nationhood. To the contrary, I use Chatterjee’s insights about how anticolonial nations develop to point out ways in which developing and

“matured” nationalisms in Sri Lanka have been imbued with heterosexual imperatives which foreclose the possibility of homosexual presence in the nation. As I stated earlier, this kind of foreclosure at the level of nation is now openly manifest in the form of blatant heterosexist attitudes and laws prohibiting same-sex acts, but Selvadurai’s fiction explores how such exclusions are also discreetly embedded in the cross-cutting identifications demanded by ethnic-nationalisms. In his interview with Afdhel Aziz, “Shyam Selvadurai: Funny Man,” Selvadurai explains how he thinks it is a major strength of *Funny Boy* that suffering is shared between characters who experience exclusion for vastly different reasons. Selvadurai describes how he works to convey that “whether you’re marginalised as a Tamil, a gay person, a woman or a person of lower caste, you all suffer the same way.” Though he does not name “the nation” or national logic as a source of violent exclusion in this interview, a rigorous study of the identities created through ethnic or sexualized imperatives must take the nation into account.

Having presented a reading of Selvadurai’s representations of “the nation” which, admittedly, is at times as cynical as it is critical, I began to think of my third chapter, with its emphasis on Selvadurai’s Canadian writerly position, as advancing a redemptive response to my second chapter. Inspired by texts such as James Clifford’s “Diasporas” which emphasize that diasporas are formed in excess of nation-states, I began to focus on those moments in *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens* which portray diasporic or diasporic-like instances of exile as liberating “solutions” to the web of problems created by oppressive authority figures and ethnic-nationalist identifications. While this type of reading offers legitimate insight into Selvadurai’s texts, however, I also became aware that my interpretation, with its emphasis on Sri Lankan nationhood, was coming dangerously close to valorizing Western diasporas while

villainizing “third world” oppressive regimes. This type of reading would be a misinterpretation. Selvadurai’s texts, rather than simply constructing such an oversimplified binary relationship between country-of-origin and diasporic position – a relationship of problem and answer – open up several cross-cutting lines of inquiry which call attention to the unique problems of the queer in diaspora.

Although diasporic situations barely appear on the level of plot in *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, both texts speak from diasporic positions and, by so doing, draw attention to an under-representation of queer presence in diaspora discourse and diaspora communities as well as an under-representation of South Asian or non-white presence in dominant queer theory. As diasporic articulations, then, Selvadurai’s texts simultaneously call for a reconsideration of heteronormative diaspora discourse as well as of universalizing Euro-American queer theory. Though he focuses on artifacts designed for popular consumption rather than academic theory, Richard Fung points to the overwhelming absence of sexualized, let alone queer, North American representations of Asians in “Looking for My Penis: the Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn.” Fung writes that “South Asians, people whose backgrounds are in the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka, hardly figure at all in North American popular representations, and those few images are ostensibly devoid of sexual connotation” (116). Though Fung’s study goes on to focus on representations of East Asian North Americans, his writing is reminiscent of the sentiments expressed in the essays, poems, and stories of South Asian emigrants in the collection *A Lotus of Another Color* which recount how homosexuals in diaspora feel unrepresented in popular culture, unacknowledged in queer theory, and marginalized in queer communities. Fung writes that, “As is the case for many other people of color and especially immigrants,

our families and our ethnic communities are a rare source of affirmation in a racist society” (118). The problem which then must be faced, however, as queer members of diaspora turn to their families and ethnic communities for a sense of inclusion, is that diasporic cultures often replicate the heteronormative biases which are implicit in diasporic national or cultural allegiances. Discussing this problem in “Q & A: Notes on a Queer Asian America,” David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom write, “As Asian American queers, we neither relate nor conform well to implicitly heterosexual models of Asian American identity” (3). Rakesh Ratti echoes this sentiment when he writes in the introduction to *A Lotus of Another Color* that “South Asian communities [in diaspora] are often uncomfortable with [queer] presence and try to pass off homosexuality as a trait foreign to our native lands” (13). Ultimately, Selvadurai’s texts, though they do not deal with diaspora on the level of plot, speak from a diasporic position to articulate experiences of sexual identity which do not find expression in mainstream queer theory and gay culture because they simultaneously stake out positions of legitimacy for “funny” South Asian men and women within South Asian diasporic communities.

Overall, the processes which drive Selvadurai’s two novels in a fundamental way and which provide the underlying connection across my three chapters can be located at an abstract level in my ongoing critical interest in silences and acts of naming. This ongoing critical interest is often manifest in this thesis in slight overlaps between chapters rather than in precise connections, but this aspect of Selvadurai’s writing allows my chapters to be in conversation with one another as I read, and occasionally re-read, particularly potent scenes with different layers of textual and cultural meaning. Arjie, a boy growing from age seven to fourteen in the *bildungsroman* *Funny Boy*, must cope with the names projected onto him by his

family, names which identify and marginalize him on the basis of his gender and sexuality long before he is even old enough to understand himself as a sexual being. Balendran, in *Cinnamon Gardens*, is a middle-aged man who struggles to maintain the appearance of a fully heteronormative life in 1927 in Ceylon even as he is painfully aware that he cannot deny his homosexual urges; while he fantasizes about England, the very thought of taking up an “uncloseted” English-style life threatens to unravel his life and his relationship with his family. Selvadurai’s novels thus ask questions about power and sexuality on several levels: they raise questions in the way they depict, in minute detail, the channels and matrices of power in the microcosm of family relationships, in the way they interweave the demands and injunctions of the family with the demands and injunctions of the nation, and in the way they balance yearning for sexual and social self-realization against Euro-American models of gay and diasporic articulations of heteronormative prejudice. Selvadurai’s texts, in speaking to a Sri Lankan readership and also to diasporic communities, negotiate what is at stake in resisting specific names and in remaining complicitous in silence as they evaluate what can be lost, but also what can be preserved through alternating acts of silence and speech in family living rooms, national laws, and displaced communities.

Chapter I

PERFORMING “FUNNY” IN THE FICTION OF SHYAM SELVADURAI

None of the words “queer,” “gay,” or “homosexual” ever appear in either of Shyam Selvadurai’s two novels, *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*. Nevertheless, the categorization of queer identity is of paramount importance in both of his texts. Working around these absences by dealing with labels and silences which construct his characters’ particular situations, Selvadurai engages the way in which queer identities are formed, the risks such identities pose, and the disciplinary measures they incur in heterosexist cultures. Because the central characters, Arjie and Balendran, cope with the economy of queer identities from different points in their respective lives, *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens* yield the most insight when they are considered alongside one another. In the *bildungsroman* *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai portrays Arjie’s development as Arjie grows from age seven to fourteen, struggling in his pre-pubescent and early-adolescent years with his nascent queer, or “funny,” identity. Although Arjie’s adult voice provides the overall narrative frame for the novel, Selvadurai limits most of the narrative to the younger Arjie’s perspective – the perspective of a child in the process of becoming intelligible as an adult. This double perspective allows the writer to map out the disjunctions between, on the one hand, emerging experiences of identification and desire and, on the other, socially constructed and imposed identities. Similar contradictions complicate Balendran’s life in *Cinnamon Gardens*, although in this second novel, Selvadurai approaches the tensions between queer identifications and queer identities from the perspective of an adult character. Balendran has a firmly-established

familial network on which he is highly dependent, but his place in the network of relationships is premised on his public heterosexual identity. Consequently, he is deeply threatened by his intense desires for homosexual and homosocial relationships which he fights but cannot extinguish. In both texts, Selvadurai examines in detail the conflicts between projected queer identity and desire to explore how sexual identities are at all times the product of a negotiation between inner desire and imposed cultural categorization.

For a theoretical sense of how identity is constructed, I will first turn to the performative model developed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Though Selvadurai ultimately challenges the limits of this model, it is a productive starting place that neatly informs the first stages of identity formation in *Funny Boy*. In heteronormative cultures, Butler argues, there is an emphasis on gender as a marker of stable, essential, inner self. Gender, in the heteronormative schema, is a supposedly natural representation of biological sex, whereby males are and can only be masculine, while females are and can only be feminine. In the tidy heteronormative system, both males and females are expected to have heterosexual inclinations, thus encouraging reproduction and ensuring cultural survival (17). The danger of this naturalized model is that it depends on suppressing and punishing certain identities, specifically “those in which gender does not follow from sex” and those “in which desire does not follow from either sex or gender” (17). To challenge this system, to allow for differently gendered or sexualized identities, Butler points out that there is not an essential relationship at work between sex, gender, and desire. Butler argues that gender is not a function of biology or an essential inner self. Even though it is often treated as an immutable internal quality, gender is actually externally constituted in the systematic repetition, or performance, of particular “words, acts, gestures, and desires” (136). “The action of gender,”

she writes, “requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” (140). Identity does not pre-date gender scripts; gender scripts, when consistently put into play, represent one of the many types of social injunctions which converge to call into being intelligible identities.

Butler points out, then, that a challenge to this dominant system must come by appropriating and redeploying the terms of that system. Butler writes that “it is only *within* the practices of a repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (145). She continues, “Just as bodily surfaces are enacted as the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself” (146). By exposing gender as not something “true” or essential, Butler undermines the often-unexplored heteronormative logic which easily embraces discrimination against queerly gendered and sexualized processes of identification.

The idea of how performative gender functions in the obligatory heterosexual schema is the prime focus of *Funny Boy's* first story, “Pigs Can’t Fly.” This first story in Selvadurai’s six-part novel introduces what Arjie considers to be his most sensationally beautiful and what others consider to be his most threatening childhood self. One Sunday a month, Arjie, along with his sister Sonali, brother Varuna (Diggy), and twelve cousins, is dropped off at his Ammachi (grandma) and Appachi’s (grandpa’s) house for a “spend-the-day” (1). After greeting their grandparents, the children break off into two camps for two different types of play: the boys play cricket in the front yard while the girls act out fairytale fantasies in the back garden. The exceptions to this category are Meena – Arjie’s female cousin who plays cricket – and Arjie himself, who always gravitates towards the girls’ territory (3).

Though Arjie and the girls play a variety of games, the most treasured of them all and the fundamental site of performative disruption in this story is the game “bride-bride.” “Bride-bride” involves the detailed enactment of an elaborate wedding ceremony. Arjie, asserting himself as the most imaginative of the cousins, always claims the role of bride. As the title of the game indicates, the most valued role is that of the bride, while, “in the hierarchy of bride-bride, the person with the least importance, less even than the priest and the page boy, [is] the groom” (6). Thus, though the game is based on that very ceremony which culturally formalizes and celebrates heteronormative logic, the sex of the children playing the ceremony is not a determining principle in the allotment of roles. Though Arjie is a boy, he always “naturally” fills the definitive female role. In his portrayal of Arjie’s dressing-up ritual, Selvadurai strikes a delicate balance between the perceived wholeness and stability of gender identities and the performance which constitutes those identities. Though Arjie’s feminine-identification clearly resonates for him on a deep inner level, the level of his “self,” Selvadurai’s language emphasizes the *process* of identification as Arjie assumes a glamorous feminine appearance. Arjie describes how

The dressing of the bride would now begin, and then by the transfiguration I saw taking place in Janaki’s cracked full-length mirror – by the sari being wrapped around my body, the veil being pinned to my head, the rouge put on my cheeks, lipstick on my lips, kohl around my eyes – I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated. (4)

At this point, Selvadurai writes of Arjie’s soulful self-invention and repeated, reverent play of “bride-bride” as a sort of prelapsarian, gender-without-borders bliss. Though Arjie must cross into this zone – that is, he knows it is not identical to his usual self – he does not experience the crossing as a violation of established gender borders; in his perception, he is

mimicking the adult world of culturally-intelligible identity. That Arjie is oblivious to his misperformance of “proper” gender becomes clear later in the story. A disruptive cousin, Tanuja, decides to usurp Arjie’s claim to the bride role. She argues, simply, that “A bride is a girl, not a boy A boy cannot be the bride” (11). She repeats, “with deep conviction,” that “A girl must be the bride” (11). None of the other cousins have considered that they, and the world around them, are marked by an inflexibility of gendered reason that polices the relationship between particular genders and particular sexes. Arjie, overwhelmed, becomes “defenceless in the face of [Tanuja’s] logic” (11). While he clearly understands that as a bride he is reveling in femininity, at this naïve stage in his seven-year-old development, he has absorbed neither the “necessary” connection between gender and biological sex nor the idea that shame is created around transgressors of this connection. Selvadurai’s writing thus resonates with Butler’s argument that gender identity is “always a doing” as it demonstrates the fulfillment which Arjie easily attains through his playful identification with the feminine ideal (25).

The disruptive potential of such a performance is soon made apparent to Arjie when his enjoyment of femininity is exposed to his aunts, uncles, and parents. In the exposure and subsequent aftermath, Selvadurai pinpoints the moment at which Arjie learns that in the heteronormative system, there is a right way and a wrong way to develop and perform identity. Selvadurai explores how discord between certain combinations of gender-sex identifications and the available stock of culturally-acceptable identities can invoke repressive modes of punishment.

The initial punishment provoked by Arjie’s bridal play draws attention to the way that sexuality is scrutinized and policed through multiple, overlapping channels. Arjie’s

experience with his aunt, Kanthi Aunty, for example, represents Arjie's first encounter with heteronormative power. Kanthi Aunty indulges in what Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* describes as "the pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light" (45). While Kanthi Aunty thus embodies an authoritative presence which enforces normative sexual identities, Selvadurai also ascribes indirect motives to Kanthi Aunty's policing in a way that anticipates his later portrayals of colliding sexual, ethnic, and national identities. Having just returned to Sri Lanka from a position of economic and social disempowerment in England where her family had suffered ongoing racial discrimination, Kanthi Aunty is distressed to see that her daughter, Tanuja does not easily integrate into the circle of cousins. Though Tanuja's low status amongst her cousins is a function of her obnoxiousness, her mother, Kanthi Aunty, is determined to improve her daughter's status by displacing Arjie from his position of leadership amongst the girls. While my mention of Kanthi Aunty's bullying of Arjie is significant because it addresses Arjie's first conflict with regulated heteronormativity, it also looks forward to the overlapping critical framework which I will invoke later in this chapter and throughout my following chapters as I address overlapping networks of power and identity.

At once revealing the limits of and affirming the disruption caused by "mis-performativity," Selvadurai shows how the exposure of Arjie's feminine gender behaviour creates a range of reactions in the heteronormative sphere of the adults. Admittedly, Arjie does not seek to create disruption through his performance of "bride-bride," but the varied responses of the different members of his family to his behaviour illustrate the various ways that lapses in "proper" gender identity are met by a variety of punishing responses. After

delightedly finding Arjie in his bride sari, Kanthi Aunty drags him to the sitting room where Arjie's other aunts and uncles break into "booming" laughter (13). Arjie, who has a sense of his own feminine identity but not a sense of how such an identity signifies in heterosexist discourse, looks to the source of utmost authority, his parents, for support. Whereas the reactions from Arjie's aunts and uncles demonstrate how easily instances of gender misperformance can be derisively dismissed, the reactions from his parents demonstrate the disruptive discomfort that such misperformances can create. Arjie's mother, Amma, looks wildly around the room "like a trapped animal" while his father, Appa, refuses to look up from his paper (14). After the insulting bout of laughter and one uncle's cry of "Ey, Chelva . . . looks like you have a funny one here," Arjie's father, with a mere "inclination of his head," signifies to his wife that she should "get rid of" Arjie (14). In this scene, Arjie first learns to experience shame at gender transgression. His stomach is in his throat and he "pick[s] up the edge of [his] veil" and flees (14). Arjie's aunts and uncles are not forced into radically reorganizing their visions of the world in order to compensate for Arjie's gender slippage. To the aunts and uncles, Arjie's inadvertent gender crossing only strengthens their sense of gender inflexibility as they reinscribe conventional gender categories with mocking laughter and the application of the label "funny."

Arjie's cross-gender performance, however, does affect his parents, who in an anxious argument later that night reveal their fear that Arjie is turning "funny" and decide that they must attempt to correct the development of this trait by reorienting Arjie's play. Though it is brief, the argument that Selvadurai constructs between Arjie's parents encapsulates the significance that queer identity poses to heteronormative culture. Specifically, the reaction of Arjie's parents to his gender play and Arjie's struggle to come to

terms with their reaction evoke the uncertainty which characterized attitudes towards homosexual identities in the late nineteenth century. As Foucault and several other theorist-historians have pointed out, prior to the late nineteenth century, there was not a distinct and prominent public identity which categorized people who engaged in same-sex sexual activity. Jeffrey Weeks, for example, describes in *Coming Out* that although the act of sodomy was made illegal in England in 1533, “sodomy” was a term with shifting significance which referred equally to “all non-procreative acts from buggery to birth control” (22). This law remained effective in England until 1885, when, under the Labouchère Amendment, the law was altered to allow for a deliberate persecution of people who practiced acts of same-sex intercourse (22). As well as describing the emergence and persecution of this new identity in the law, Foucault describes the extensive panorama of psychological and medical discursive knowledge which developed to deal with this new category; he writes that “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). As Arjie eavesdrops on his parents’ argument on the night that his cross-gender behaviour is exposed and categorized as “funny,” he begins to develop a sense that his behaviour corresponds to some type of reprehensible identity.

Arjie’s parents’ reaction reads as a contemporary heterosexist parental response, but it is also reminiscent of the public reactions to homosexuality which developed near the close of the nineteenth century. Foucault writes that sexual scrutiny, as a form of power, “demanded constant, attentive, and curious presences for its exercise . . . it proceeded through examination and insistent observation” (44). This description is echoed in Appa’s complaint that Arjie’s queerness could have been prevented with more surveillance: he says accusingly to Amma, “You should have kept an eye on him” (14). Appa then invokes a sense

of the shame that will mark the family if Arjie's behaviour is allowed to develop into a publicly-recognized identity. Arjie overhears his father lament that, "If he turns out funny like that Rankotwerka boy . . . he [will] be the laughing-stock of Colombo" (14). After overhearing his parents' argument, particularly the points at which they name his love for "bride-bride" as "funny," Arjie encounters the possibility that he is a wrongly-gendered subject. Building on Foucault's historical-theoretical arguments, Butler writes in "Critically Queer" that "the 'I' only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated" and that "recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject" (18). While Arjie derives enjoyment from the act of performing femininity, he begins to suffer alienation as a non-normative person when his parents interpret his behaviour as evidence of his being culturally intelligible as a "funny" boy.

In depicting the extensive confusion which Arjie suffers as a result of imposed queer identity, Selvadurai denaturalizes heteronormative logic and exposes the machinations of heterosexist power as they occur at the level of the family. In the immediate aftermath of his parents' argument, Arjie grapples with the terms of his apparent non-normativity at the linguistic level as he puzzles over his parents' use of the word "funny." The general sense of sexualized and gendered deviance conveyed in Amma and Appa's use of the term and Arjie's confused reaction speak to queer politics on a linguistic level by evoking a sense of the word "queer." Arjie knows that "funny" means "either humorous or strange, as in the expression, 'that's funny,'" but he sees that this denotation is not identical with his parents' use of the term (17). Moreover, Selvadurai emphasizes the imposed and obfuscating quality of labels such as "queer" and "funny" by portraying a discrepancy between Amma and Appa's label for Arjie and Arjie's actual experiences. As later incidents in the novel make clear, Arjie's

family uses the term “funny” to refer nebulously to sexual as well as gender deviance. Arjie’s confusion then, at this point in his seven-year-old life, also stems from his lack of knowledge or experience with any sexual desire, deviant or otherwise. This act of naming thus presumes to “recognize” identity even while preceding that which it claims to describe. Though Arjie does not grasp the denotation of “funny” any more than he had understood the slurs with which his cousin had assailed him earlier in the story – “pansy,” “faggot,” and “sissy” (11) – he does recognize the “hint of disgust in his [father’s] tone” (17). Thus, though Arjie does not really understand the mystifying economy of queer identities, he comes closer to realizing that his behaviour in “bride-bride” translates into something distinct and distasteful in the adult world.

The implications of Arjie’s assigned “funniness” become clearer to Arjie when his parents try to correct his mis-gendered behaviour. In the wake of Arjie’s exposure, Amma prohibits his playing of the game “bride-bride.” She stipulates firmly that Arjie is “a big boy now. And big boys must play with other boys” (20). When Arjie protests, Amma tries to inscribe gender normativity using only a dismissive, childish rhyme for justification. She says that Arjie must behave like a boy and not like a girl, “Because the sky’s so high and pigs can’t fly, that’s why” (19). Because this silly logic only deepens Arjie’s sense that obligatory heteronormativity is inane, Amma eventually concedes in anger that “Life is full of stupid things,” but still insists that “sometimes we just have to do them” (20). Gayatri Gopinath points out the inherent contradiction of Amma’s approach in “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora” when she notes that “[Appa’s] rhetoric of nonconformity as perversion is undercut by Arjie’s mother making apparent the nonsensical nature of gender codification” (475). Although Amma thus exposes her own and Appa’s weak argumentative ground, she does not stop

trying to regulate Arjie's gender identity, and forces him to perform juvenile masculinity by playing cricket with his brother and the other boys.

Arriving to play cricket with Diggy and the other boys, Arjie is taunted as a "girlie-boy," but knows he is not allowed to quit the game or he will face his mother's wrath (25). The insult, however, reminds Arjie of the newly-discovered disruptive potential of his "girly-ness," and allows him to seize some measure of agency where he would otherwise be utterly disempowered among the boys. Selvadurai again draws attention to the way power is exercised through overlapping fields as Arjie queers the cricket game by pretending to ignore the conflation of normative masculinity and the boys' cricket rules. Fully aware that he is considered unworthy of taking a turn at bat because of his effeminacy, Arjie insists on the high position in the hierarchy of the boys' batting order which is bestowed on him through random assignment. In this move, Arjie engineers his own rejection from the game as he demands un-gendered access to the role ascribed to him by the boys' rules. Diggy is embarrassed and kicks his brother out of the game. Realizing that he will be held responsible by Amma for his brother's absence, Diggy then becomes furious and chases Arjie away. In playing the rules of cricket against the boys' normative masculine logic, Arjie is not only excused from the misery of the game, but is also free of responsibility for this expulsion after having successfully displaced responsibility onto Diggy.

While the identities applied to Arjie are, thus, turned against authoritative figures to disrupt his family's heteronormative attitudes, the results of this disruption also reveal the practical limitations of such an approach. Arjie achieves victory in his escape from the confines of the "correctly" gendered male community and in his exposure of his parents' heteronormative logic as ridiculous. However, the rejection which Arjie attains from the

boy-world of cricket does not grant him renewed admittance to the girl-world of “bride-bride.” The ensuing isolation which characterizes Arjie’s position by the end of “Pigs Can’t Fly” speaks to a problem that is overlooked in models of performative resistance. As Terry Goldie writes in “Introduction: Queerly Postcolonial,” theories of performative subversion such as those advanced by Butler in *Gender Trouble* can “lead to a form of de-selving. . . . [while some people] have argued that such disintegration is liberating . . . one would need a very stable core to live such an unstable life long term” (19). Such is Arjie’s dilemma near the close of “Pigs Can’t Fly.” Though he has effectively rattled his parents’ sense of gender stability, Arjie’s initial gender transgression and ensuing gender rebellion result in isolation from both groups of children and from his parents. Arjie laments that he will “Never [again] stand in front of Janaki’s mirror, watching a transformation take place” as he is “caught between the boys’ and the girls’ worlds, not belonging or wanted in either” (39). This excluded position, as I illustrate in my third chapter, carries a heightened significance for homosexual men and women in diasporic communities who depend on their families for community while living in racist cultures. On the level of plot, Arjie realizes as early as the next story that his isolation is not eternal and that new affiliations can be established which enable more fulfilling performances of femininity. Nonetheless, the closing images of “Pigs Can’t Fly” testify to the pain caused by isolation from the family network, isolation which can result from strategies of disruptive misperformance.

Though resistance based on performances of gender which appropriate and play on heteronormative expectations is shown here to have its limits, Selvadurai continues to challenge the naturalized connection between gender, sex, and heterosexual desire in his later stories. In the fourth story, for example, “Small Choices,” Arjie receives solid support for his

non-normativity from the family's new houseguest, Jegan. At this point in *Funny Boy*, Arjie is thirteen years old and the distance between his life and the heteronormative ideal is ever-increasing. Though he no longer engages in performances of femininity, Arjie's introduction to Jegan coincides with Arjie's first stirrings of same-sex desire. The two characters do not share a romantic relationship – Jegan is 25 years old and his sexual orientation is never explicitly revealed by Selvadurai – but Arjie's relationship with Jegan is emblematic of the kind of understanding attitudes which can be developed between people who suffer the burden of marginalized identities. As I discuss at length in my second chapter, Jegan's supportive outlook may stem from his own experiences of painful marginalization as a disenfranchised member of the Tamil minority. Jegan's motivation for supporting Arjie is, like his sexual orientation, never explicitly revealed, but Jegan strives to counter the Chelvaratnam family's harsh critical attitudes towards Arjie's divergences from heteronormative identity.

Whereas Selvadurai's first story focuses on Arjie's resistance to heterosexist discrimination as articulated through the disparaging names used to categorize Arjie, "Small Choices" emphasizes the way that silence can work to alienate non-normative behaviour. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick draws attention to the role of silence as a tool which enables heterosexist discrimination in *Epistemology of the Closet*. Sedgwick begins by quoting from Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, Volume One, when he writes that "There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (3). Locating this observation in a discussion of contemporary sexual politics, Sedgwick explains how different silences can act as shifting covers for the dangerous preservation of ignorance. She writes that "ignorance effects," sustained in selective silences,

“can be harnessed, licensed, and regulated on a mass scale for striking enforcements” of heterosexist attitudes (5). While the discussion in my second chapter analyzes how silences work on the broad scale of the nation, my discussion here attends to the way that silences also work on the microcosmic familial level to smother potentially positive homosexual identities and attempt to prevent the exposure of heterosexist ignorance. While Arjie’s father and Jegan are sitting together, Arjie overhears Appa attempt to raise the topic of Arjie’s queerness. Appa worries aloud to Jegan that Arjie, “From the time he was small . . . has shown certain tendencies” (166). Arjie’s father attempts to create a shaming silence around Arjie’s non-normative behaviour, as if what he thinks of as Arjie’s queerness is too terrible to speak of aloud, but Jegan refuses to be complicitous in such heteronormative mystification. Demanding specification, he asks of Appa, “What do you mean, tendencies?” (166). Mr. Chelvaratnam fumbles in embarrassment, unable to name his suspicions with precision, and eventually asks Jegan to help Arjie grow out of “this phase” (166). Jegan, however, exasperated with the heterosexist tactic of elusive silence, at once refuses Appa’s nebulous charges and the terms of the conversation, saying dismissively, “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with him” (166). Jegan does not put into circulation a positive homosexual identity for Arjie, but he does refuse the circulation of a nebulous stigmatizing identity. Arjie grasps the significance of Jegan’s defence, and says, “For as long as I could remember, my father had alluded to this ‘tendency’ in me without ever giving it a name. Jegan was the first one ever to defend me, and for this I grew even more devoted to him” (166). Arjie’s recollection is, of course, flawed at this moment. When Arjie was much younger, he heard his father describe him as “funny” and, as I have discussed, obsessed over the possible consequences of this label. In having Arjie make this comment, however, Selvadurai draws

attention to an important characteristic of hegemonic, heteronormative power. The cloaking of homosexuality through ambiguous terminology and smoky silences prevents Arjie from growing positively as a sexual being with his family's support. Though Arjie's family applies the label "funny" to Arjie behind his back, thus enabling secret categorization of and discrimination against him, they stubbornly refuse to allow him access to this category by refraining from openly using such signs in his presence. By refusing to partake in such meaning-making, however, and asking for specific descriptions instead of nuances and veiled implications, Jegan exposes the strategy of silence which lay underneath Appa's earlier acts of naming and allows Arjie to identify silencing as a method creating marginalization.

Despite the support offered by Jegan in "Small Choices," Amma and Appa's efforts to regulate Arjie's general "funny" continue into "The Best School of All," when Appa tries to formally masculinize Arjie by sending him to a colonial-style boys' school. Revealing a hope that he can regulate Arjie's sexual identity with the support of a British-modeled educational institution, Appa decides to send Arjie to The Queen Victoria Academy. Though he still refuses to directly address the issue of Arjie's suspect sexuality, responding evasively when Arjie digs for the reasoning behind the decision, Appa explains abruptly to Arjie: "The Academy will force you to become a man" (210). This statement reinscribes the heterosexist matrix of gender-sex-sexuality. Presumably, the Academy will cleanse Arjie of the broadly-inclusive "funny" identity which Appa had assigned to Arjie as many as six years before Arjie first experienced homosexual desire. In making this statement, Appa also shows his belief that though Arjie is not a heteronormative person, he can grow into heteronormativity with the proper application of institutional force. Later, Arjie pushes Diggy for a more precise reason for his forced relocation from St. Gabriel's, the co-educational Catholic school where

he is content, to The Queen Victoria Academy. Diggy, replicating his father's oscillation between evasive silences and obfuscatory naming, eventually answers, "[Appa] doesn't want you turning out funny or anything like that," before glaring at Arjie accusingly (210). It is of the utmost irony that The Queen Victoria Academy offers Arjie the opportunity to meet his first lover and develop a positive expression of his sexuality that is not foreclosed by imposed sexual identities.

Though Arjie had flirted with an infatuation for Jegan, his sexuality does not flourish until he builds a relationship with Shehan Soyza at the Academy. In my second and third chapters, I explore why Arjie cannot invest in a positive homosexual identity for reasons originating at the level of the nation-state and in the narrator's diasporic positioning. In this chapter, however, where I restrict myself to Arjie's immediate context, I will explore how Arjie negotiates a homosexual self-realization and will postpone my discussion of the ways such a realization is complicated by more far-reaching politics. The peak period during which Arjie comes to awareness about his emerging sexuality is, in "The Best School of All," at times violent and painful. Arjie's relationship with Shehan begins casually, through a series of classroom encounters and punishments shared at the hand of the vicious principal, known colloquially as "Black Tie." Despite his budding attraction to Jegan, Arjie is still extremely naïve about his own sexuality. After a conversation in which Diggy warns Arjie about Shehan's sexual episodes with the head prefect, Arjie is incapable of even imagining homosexual sex. He states, "I was aware of what a sex act between a man and a woman entailed. But between two boys?" (233). Though he grapples with the idea, he eventually decides that the notion must only be a fiction, "Diggy's silly story" (233). Not too long after this, however, as his relationship with Shehan escalates – surviving, even, a surprising and

passionate first kiss – Arjie finds himself a dazed participant in just such a sex act. Though Arjie has heard often enough that he is “funny” and has felt the isolation imposed by such an identity, the revelation that he could be a practicing homosexual causes him to experience sudden self-loathing. He lashes out at Shehan, revealing a deeply internalized heterosexism as he calls Shehan “revolting” (265). Shehan, hurt, responds to Arjie’s disgust and shame by saying to Arjie, “in the end you’re no different from me” (265). Arjie, unable to think of himself in the available terms which constitute his knowledge of homosexuality, hits Soyza, knocking him to the floor. The next day, however, after seeing Shehan receive a particularly brutal beating from the principal, Arjie realizes his mistake: “With the terrible regret of a realization come too late, I saw that I had misjudged what we had done in the garage. Shehan had not debased me or degraded me, but rather had offered me his love. And I had scorned it” (269). Only in this moment does Arjie realize that his love for Shehan is constituted through identification with him and can be legitimately expressed through particular sex acts; Arjie realizes that what he suddenly understands as love is not representable in the available stock of heterosexist projections of homosexual identities which dominates his inherited range of sexual possibilities.

Selvadurai emphasizes the difference between the process of identification and the processes of subscribing to a particular identity when Arjie eventually decides to spectacularly express his love for Shehan under extraordinary circumstances. My analysis in ensuing chapters of deeply-rooted cultural heterosexism in Sri Lanka and in diasporic communities illuminates Selvadurai’s decision to portray Arjie’s sexuality in this way; my analysis in this chapter, however, attends to the way Selvadurai’s refusal to assign stable identities to his characters’ sexualities allows them to emerge as successful lovers on their

own terms by dismantling heterosexist forces. As evidenced by the fact that Arjie's revelation of love appears as he witnesses Shehan's suffering, a key part of Arjie's relationship with Shehan resides in the sense of solidarity which he feels as a fellow victim of complex power regimes. Reflecting on his situation, Arjie thinks not only of his and Shehan's foreclosed sexualities, but also of other people in his life who had experienced political and ethnic oppression through various authoritative channels. He realizes that "everything had to do with who held power and who didn't. If you were powerful like Black Tie or my father you got to decide what was right or wrong" (274). Having earlier offended Shehan by rejecting his love in the family garage, Arjie decides that he can express solidarity with and love for Shehan by disrupting the most immediate and persistent source of Shehan's disempowerment. Arjie plots to dislodge Black Tie from his position of authority as the principal at The Queen Victoria Academy. Reminiscent of when he engineered his own dismissal from Diggy's game of cricket by manipulating the contradictory overlaps between otherwise co-ordinated spheres of power, Arjie realizes that he can unseat Black Tie if he can perform the right kind of social repetitions at crucial moments.

A useful theoretical figure which can open my discussion of performative identity to encompass questions of identity beyond the realms of gender and sexuality identity is the "mimic man," a figure identified by Homi Bhabha in "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." In this essay, Bhabha discusses a cultural situation which parallels Butler's attention to the subversive power of performative identities. Specifically, Bhabha deals with the colonial strategy of power whereby colonized subjects are recruited by colonizing powers to perform as agents of colonial authority. While the absorption of colonized peoples into European colonial regimes fulfills the colonizer's

civilizing mission, Bhabha argues, this absorption can constitute a menace to colonial stability when “European-ness” is performed too accurately and colonial presence is threatened with its own redundancy (86). This line of argument resonates with Butler’s pointing out of the way that heteronormative gender identities are constituted in mimicry. Moreover, in Bhabha’s model of performativity, “Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire,” but “raises the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations” (90). Bhabha’s theory thus resonates with Selvadurai’s writing in that Selvadurai, like Bhabha, questions the ways in which hegemonic representations of non-normative identities authorize their own power while keeping characters such as Arjie and Shehan in disempowered positions. The combination of these two theoretical perspectives provides a broader language for my analysis of how Arjie negotiates overlapping fields of power by his manipulation of identities constructed through compulsory, repetitive performance. The combination of these two perspectives also lays the foundation for my future chapters, where I explore the complex interconnections between sexual, national, and diasporic identities in Selvadurai’s writing.

Although Bhabha stresses that mimicry is not a tool of outright subversive destruction, Arjie is presented with a unique opportunity to create dramatic disruption through the agency afforded by mimicked identity when he is granted the authority to represent the The Queen Victoria Academy at a major assembly held for students, parents, and an important politician. Arjie realizes that he has the potential to assert his love for Shehan by disrupting the power structure which consistently works against him. Though Arjie realizes that the systematic discrimination against himself, Shehan, and innumerable pupils who “had been [the school’s] prisoners” over the years goes beyond the particular

oppression of Black Tie and heterosexist politics, Arjie targets Black Tie as representing the power which consigns Arjie's lover to states of extreme suffering (273). Reminiscent of when Arjie arranged for his own ejection from the game of cricket at his grandmother's house, Arjie's power in "The Best School of All" rests in the agency he accrues in manipulating the dissonance between different discourses. Black Tie, a deeply British-style colonial schoolmaster, is already in jeopardy; his position is threatened by the pro-Sinhalese vice-principal, Mr. Lokubandara, who wants to take over the school so that he might transform it into a Sinhalese institute. Though Arjie is a Tamil, and so would, presumably, suffer new discrimination under Mr. Lokubandara, he sees and takes an opportunity to redeploy power. He plots to destroy a speech that Black Tie makes to a visiting minister of cabinet, whose opinion will either maintain the school in its current, colonial form or push it towards becoming a Sinhalese institution. Arjie's duty is to memorize and deliver two poems which the minister loves – "Vitae Lampada" and "The Best School of All" – and around which Black Tie has organized his plea for the maintenance of an inter-ethnic school. As Arjie observes, "the poems were an indispensable part of [Black Tie's] last hope of triumphing over Lokubandara" (276). In being trusted with the repetition of these poems and this role, Arjie finally realizes that "because [Black Tie] needed me, power had moved into my hands" (276). Thus, when the day finally arrives and Arjie delivers his poems, he delivers them in an utterly haphazard, senseless way, using the tactic of what Butler describes as "taking up the tools where they lie" in a calculated misperformance designed to wreck the flow of stable significance (145 *Gender Trouble*). Because Black Tie's speech is dependent on Arjie's demonstration of how traditional colonial education produces refined future citizens,

his plea completely disintegrates and he ends up making a worse impression on the minister than if he had not made a speech at all (282-83).

Notably, Arjie's subversion is not performed overtly in the name of anti-heterosexism or in the name of a particular identity. Initially, not even Shehan understands the significance of the mangled delivery. He says to Arjie after the assembly, "You knew those poems perfectly. How could you mix them up like that?" (283). Only then can Arjie explain that he has proved his love on the grandest stage he could find in the grandest gesture he could muster. "I did it for you," he says to Shehan, "I couldn't bear to see you suffer any more" (284). Some critics, for example, Peter G. Christenson in *Asian-American Writers: A Bio-Bibliographic Sourcebook*, criticize Arjie's decision to indirectly aid the racist vice-principal's bid for control. Christenson writes that Arjie has "perhaps acted stupidly" in this gesture, "for he may be helping the more ethnically intolerant master consolidate his power" (335). Arjie, however, does not act "stupidly" at all. Arjie's self-interjection into the school's heated ethnic and postcolonial political battle results from his careful calculation of how he can harness power through a misperformance from his temporary position of authority as the Academy's representative. Arjie is fully and regretfully aware that he contributes to the rise of Mr. Lokubandara and Sinhalese nationalism in the school, but he is also aware that in a system which designs itself to oppress people like himself and Shehan, opportunities for disruptive agency must be seized where they lie.

In *Funny Boy*, the use of an adult voice limited in its recollection to a child's perspective allows Selvadurai to revisit processes of identification and identity as they shape emerging genders and sexualities. By revisiting the discrepancy between processes of identification and identity, Selvadurai exposes the constructedness of dominant, heterosexist

views of queerness. Moreover, although Selvadurai does not assert positive homosexual identity under any particular label, his text identifies and breaks silences at the family level to establish the power of despised identities and to assert the legitimacy of same-sex desire and love, even while avoiding open conflict along a single axis of identity. Selvadurai continues with his project of interrupting dominant representations of scorned identities in his second novel, *Cinnamon Gardens*. Instead of carefully separating heterosexist assumption from homosexual experience by detailing the growth of a maturing character as he did in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai, in *Cinnamon Gardens*, takes up a more complex narrative perspective that renegotiates the past to understand the future, and thus make sense of the present. The novel's homosexual protagonist, Balendran Navaratnam, lives in Ceylon in 1927 in what seems to be a conventional heteronormative life. By exploring conflicted experiences of sexuality and sexual identities in a novel set in the early twentieth century, Selvadurai continues to specify silences and ignorances which contribute to contemporary manifestations of heterosexism. The idea of revisiting history is, then, key to Selvadurai's representation of homosexuality in his second book. As the characters revisit and renarrate their pasts in a novel which delves into a collective cultural past, they discover fresh insights which help them throw off negative identities and resist heterosexist networks of power. Through *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai flashes back to the infancy of homosexual identity as a significant category of cultural identity. By looking to this particular past in this novel, Selvadurai allows for new insights to dawn on contemporary configurations of queer and homosexual identities.

Selvadurai begins Balendran's journey of self-discovery by showing him caught in the anxious tension of a publicly heteronormative life that is belied by his hidden same-sex

desires. Balendran implicitly reveals the performative status of identity as he surrounds himself with signs that reproduce a heteronormative life narrative. As Selvadurai introduces Balendran it quickly becomes clear that he is a much more developed example of the sexualized mimic man than is *Funny Boy's* Arjie. Balendran is a 40-year-old character whose position in the world is constituted by a series of overlapping heterosexist scripts which correspond to create an illusory heterosexual identity. His overlapping performances are not mere play; he really is a husband, a father, and a son. In Balendran's mind, however, these roles are primarily significant not for the love or comfort they generate, but for the identity which they constitute. The narrator subtly emphasizes that Balendran must overperform his normativity to ensure proper social signification. For example, though Balendran's relationship with his son is important for its own sake, Balendran also perceives it as a performative success because it is "the envy of all his son's friends" (40). Also, though his relationship with his wife includes elements of love, Balendran sees value in their relationship because she is "constantly told by her friends how lucky she [is]" to have a husband such as him (40). Selvadurai indicates how Balendran's most intimate relationships are qualified by their ability to register as exemplary heteronormative relationships in the social world.

Despite the successful stability of Balendran's public cluster of heteronormative identities, Balendran's fretful performances are motivated by an internalized sense of self-loathing that is reminiscent of Arjie's first sexual experience. Whereas Arjie's shocked reaction at the suggestion that he is a homosexual erupts out of naivety following the loss of his virginity, Balendran's distaste for his sexuality stems from his knowledge of the medical, essentialist rhetoric of the late nineteenth century. Balendran's opinion of his own sexuality

is deeply influenced by the explosive proliferation of sexualized identities across Europe and European colonies which took place in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries across medical, legal, and religious discourses. Weeks, in *Coming Out*, explains how these discourses isolated and essentialized homosexual identities in various mutually reinforcing ways. He writes, “If the law and its associated penalties made homosexuals into outsiders, and religion gave them a high sense of guilt, medicine and science gave them a deep sense of inferiority and inadequacy” (31). Weeks provides a summary of how prominent doctors’ opinions on sexuality turned attention away from social constructions of identity and focused instead on essentializing sexuality in tandem with essentialized deficient morality: Cesare Lombroso linked homosexuality to a degenerate criminal mind, Karl Westphal pointed to “moral insanity,” and Veniamin Tarnovsky wrote that homosexuals’ condition “came from damage to their parents’ genes, resulting from hysteria, epilepsy, alcoholism, anaemia, typhus, debauchery, soil, climate, or altitude” (Weeks 27). While Balendran does not dwell on specific doctors or specific branches of medical-psychological discourse, he experiences his sexuality with a sense of guilt and finality in terms which bear traces of these dominant discourses. “His disposition,” the narrator laments, focalizing on Balendran’s sense of self, “like a harsh word spoken, a cruel act done, was regrettably irreversible” (38). Balendran thus embraces a paradoxical understanding of identity in which his heteronormative, performatively-constituted identity is necessitated by his understanding of individual, immoral, irrevocable sexuality.

Selvadurai does not seek to effect dramatic subversion in drawing this portrait of a character who has a performative heterosexual identity despite his disgust for what he considers to be his essential homosexual core. Instead, Selvadurai creates this tension as a

sympathetic reflection of the terror that possessed homosexually-identifying men in Ceylon in the early twentieth century, a terror that was not, certainly, restricted to that time and place. In the opening portrait of Balendran's identity, Selvadurai shows Balendran's father, the Mudaliyar Navaratnam, to be a particularly important enforcer of Balendran's normativity. Echoing the pattern laid out in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai, in this father-son relationship, draws attention to the way in which heterosexist scrutiny threatens, even as it seeks to maintain, the illusion of stability and normalcy in the family network. Unlike Balendran's wife and son, the Mudaliyar is aware of Balendran's past sexual deviance. The Mudaliyar, moreover, played an active role in enforcing heteronormative standards upon Balendran by violently destroying Balendran's only stable same-sex relationship, developed when he was a student in England. As soon as the Mudaliyar is introduced into Balendran's consciousness in *Cinnamon Gardens*, Balendran shudders, remembering how the Mudaliyar had, twenty years before, "come to his flat in London, somehow knowing of his relationship with Richard [his lover]" (39). Because the Mudaliyar knows the truth of Balendran's past, then, he represents the power which insists on assimilating Balendran into the heteronormative fiction of his present life even as he maintains a sense of Balendran's fundamental difference.

In this opening portrait, Balendran perceives himself as constituted by a false, performed public identity that belies a true inner self, but Selvadurai's project is not to play out a "nature *versus* nurture" debate. Instead, Selvadurai calls attention to processes and terms through which "homosexual nature" is made socially intelligible. Balendran's same-sex desire is, obviously, internally experienced, so Selvadurai's representation of identity-struggle is significant because it addresses the way that identities were constructed and circulated in

1927. Selvadurai draws attention to the provisionality of identities when he describes the meeting between Balendran's wife and Balendran's long-lost lover, Richard when Richard appears as a traveler in Ceylon. Sonia does not know about Balendran's homosexual past and so does not hesitate to comment on Richard and his new lover, Alliston's, sexual identities after their lunch date. Selvadurai is careful to write language for Sonia that does not survive in today's popular language, thus infusing the moment with a sense of historical distance. The term "homosexual" was invented in 1869 and was in popular use in England by 1890 (Weeks 3), but Sonia, in 1927, does not employ this term to describe Richard and Alliston. Instead of using the term "homosexual," which would suggest continuity with the contemporary social significance of homosexual identity, Selvadurai testifies to the historical legacy of heterosexism by having Sonia use the dated terms, "inverts" and "friends of Oscar" (111). Balendran is "shocked" that Sonia "actually [knows] what inversion is. . . . A thing [he had thought was] beyond the pale of refined society, beyond the understanding of decent women"; however Sonia shows that she is familiar with not only the formal and colloquial labels but also the stereotypes that accompany them: she says that she recognized their inversion because of "the difference in their ages" (111). "Besides," she adds, "Mr. Alliston was a little 'outré,' as Aunty Ethel would say" (111). This episode contains a densely-packed representation of the discourses which created homosexual identity in the early twentieth century. By reconstructing this identity in terms and stereotypes that a contemporary audience will recognize but not circulate themselves, Selvadurai draws attention to the historicity and social constructedness of culturally-intelligible identities. Having cited Jeffrey Weeks's *Coming Out* in the acknowledgements, Selvadurai seems to be sharing Weeks' project as the latter describes it in the introduction to *Coming Out*: "only by

understanding the complexity of actual history can we fully engage with the limitations and opportunities that surround us in the historic present in which we live our identities” (Weeks x). Likewise, by putting history into play through narrative, Selvadurai reminds us of the constructed assumptions that still dominate contemporary discourses in heterosexist cultures.

Accentuating his project of reconstructing the past to break cultural oscillations between oppressive silences and demonized sexual identities, Selvadurai narrates the healing power that comes from experiences of revisiting and renarrating the past through Balendran and Richard’s reunification. Balendran and Richard’s stable relationship had been torn apart by the Mudaliyar in 1907, twenty years before the novel’s present. The two men never communicated in the aftermath, and so had never achieved any sense of closure in the wake of their estrangement. Through a small series of fragmented narratives in the novel’s present, however – fragmented for both the reader and the characters – Richard and Balendran find solidarity in their reconstruction of the events which constituted their break-up. Through these disjointed revelations, Selvadurai illustrates the vulnerability of open same-sex relationships to total rupture in early-twentieth century England, where Richard and Balendran lived together as students until the Mudaliyar stormed into their flat, chasing Balendran out into the rain. As Richard recalls the events in conversation with Alliston, the reader finds out even before Balendran does that Richard fell to his knees and begged for mercy while the Mudaliyar slapped him and threatened to have him charged with sodomy (141). “I was terrified,” Richard confesses to Alliston, “After all, it hadn’t been that long since the Wilde trial” (141). Only later, after Richard shares this story with Balendran, does Balendran offer his complementary experience, explaining how after running into the rain he

developed pneumonia. Balendran describes how his father moved in and nursed him back to physical health, but wreaked severe psychological damage upon Balendran by refusing to speak to him for a month (162). Echoing Arjie's family experiences in *Funny Boy*, Balendran explains how his father utterly alienated him with total silence before forcing him to conform to the patriarchal standards of heteronormative masculinity. By reconstructing the history of the events that they shared in experience but could never understand through shared narrative, Balendran and Richard gain a restored sense of their past relationship. In the bliss of their new sense of empowerment and self-worth, Balendran and Richard celebrate their love by reviving their sexual relationship (191).

Balendran and Richard's reunification, however, is not created by Selvadurai as a simple solution to deep cultural discrimination, and their love is soon challenged by the renewed, overwhelming pressure of heteronormative social scripts. Though Balendran becomes refreshed by the time he spends with Richard, the Mudaliyar notices that the threat of Balendran's sexuality is rising to the fore and again conscripts Balendran into the patriarchal economy. Harnessing the power of regulated repetitive practice to create identity, the Mudaliyar plots to manipulate Balendran by drawing him back into a cycle of heterosexual scripts. Devising a business trip in Jaffna, the Mudaliyar provisionally heightens Balendran's position in the family patriarchy: he demands that Balendran fill his role as head patriarch in Columbo while he is on his trip. Balendran is ordered to live in the family home, look after his mother, and attend to his father's business duties. The newly-assigned heteronormative regime reinscribes Balendran with a freshly-internalized heterosexism. He thinks of the tangible heteronormative investments he has made – his relationships with his wife, Sonia, and son, Lukshman – and how they are utterly incompatible with his revived

desire for and identification with Richard. Looking at a picture of Lukshman, Balendran “[has] a sudden vision of that smile leaving his son’s face replaced by horror and revulsion at his father’s crime” (204). Balendran then thinks of how the “revelation [of his homosexuality] would shatter” Sonia, as she is “so dependent for her happiness, her existence, on the life they had created together” (204). In depicting Balendran as he takes up a heteronormative life with heightened social importance, Selvadurai draws attention to the limitations of turning to history as a strategy for heterosexist resistance. Though shared narratives can be a source of solidarity-building resistance, Selvadurai illustrates that they are not a source of outright volatile subversion.

The potency of history to affect and destabilize oppressive patriarchal power – particularly, though not exclusively, in its heterosexist manifestation – rises again in Balendran’s life as he reconnects with Arul, the brother whom his father has disowned. Arul, now living in India with his wife, Pakkiam, and son, Seelan, is on his deathbed wasting away from lung cancer. The Navaratnam family’s public narrative holds that Arul was banished because of his love for Pakkiam, who had been a family servant. Both this narrative and Balendran’s larger sense of social stability are drastically subverted, however, when Balendran discovers that the exile was actually imposed because Arul’s love interfered with the Mudaliyar’s designs to raise Pakkiam as a sex slave. As with the history of Balendran’s first break from Richard, Selvadurai allows the narrative to surface through the multiple voices, including Arul’s and Pakkiam’s, as well as through Balendran’s memory. Balendran listens to the different stories, comparing them against the ones he had thought true, until he understands that Pakkiam had been brought to the family home when still a child so that she could eventually replace her aging mother as the Mudaliyar’s mistress (275-78). Balendran

realizes that, aside from Arul and Pakkiam's son, Seelan, he is the last adult person in the family to see the alternative narrative lurking beneath the family's dominant version of history. Not only do Arul, Pakkiam, and the Mudaliyar know the real course of events, but other people who know include the family's main servant, Pillai, and Balendran's mother. Thus, as shocked as Balendran is to learn about his father's systematic rape of Pakkiam's mother and his intentions to replicate this relationship with Pakkiam, he is as shocked to learn that the family maintains the Mudaliyar's performed identity of a decent, responsible social leader through silence. Balendran's "prop of existence," the love and respect for his father, which had comforted him in his "exile from himself," now, with this series of revelations, "had been dislodged" (279). After building up and allowing the tearing down of a love-based homosexual identity with Richard on two occasions, he now realizes that, in striving to be like his father, he has sacrificed this sense of self for a mere mimicry of a mimicry of ideal manhood. Arul, revealing implicitly that he knows about Balendran's secret sexuality, says, "You have been blind to the reality of life, Bala. You have spent your whole life living by codes everyone lays down but nobody follows" (273). Only at this point, after working over and sifting through other people's story fragments, which disrupt what seemed to be a relatively stable past, does Balendran realize that his sense of family history is no more true than the identity he has striven to approximate in his own mimic man role.

Though at first Balendran objects only passively to the awful inconsistencies festering beneath the Mudaliyar's noble public identity, eventually he openly challenges this main source of heterosexist oppression. Balendran's previous understanding of himself as performing a "false" identity that is belied by a regrettably "true" homosexual core becomes replaced by a new understanding of how identity relates to identifications and desires.

Balendran comes to realize that his identifications and desires, in regards to both his family and his former lover, need not operate according to the selective truth principle and economy of silences around which the heterosexist arsenal of identities is organized. Throughout most of the novel, Balendran is painfully aware that his heteronormative identity operates through mimicry and is built on false pretences. Nonetheless, he eventually strikes a balance between his “false” heteronormative identity and the genuine relationships which he depends on to constitute that identity. Selvadurai’s text demonstrates that identities are never completely “true” or “false” as Balendran realizes that the performative nature of his public identity does not render his identifications with and love for his family illegitimate.

Selvadurai does not construct a final battle where essential identity triumphs over performed identity, but he does allow Balendran to expose the machinations of heteronormative identity while maintaining different relationship identifications, some of which are vital to and some of which are inadmissible in heteronormative regimes. Bringing to light the contradictions of the Mudaliyar’s personal history, Balendran effectively dismantles the Mudaliyar’s illusion of invincibility. As in *Funny Boy*, the key usurpation of oppressive power in *Cinnamon Gardens* encompasses conflicts along multiple axes of identity and disempowerment. Balendran begins his confrontation of his father by demanding reparations for his exiled and poverty-stricken sister-in-law, Pakkiam, and her son, Seelan. The conversation, however, quickly spreads to also address the Mudaliyar’s abusive repression of Balendran’s sexuality. As Balendran uncovers certain injustices, he becomes increasingly aware of the many silences and ignorances which are maintained by his father. Parallel with Sedgwick’s call to “pluralize and specify” the ignorances and silences which empower heterosexist regimes, Balendran brings to light incidents of which the Mudaliyar

never speaks. Still intimidated by the Mudaliyar's strength, Balendran is initially tentative about breaking these masking silences. Asking why the Mudaliyar had come to London twenty years ago, Balendran feels "as if he [is] testing something unknown, prodding at it" (367). Gaining confidence, Balendran rocks the stability of the Mudaliyar's worldview by putting the illusory quality of his heteronormative identity in contrast with his prior life of open homosexual desires and identifications: "I might have been truly happy," he says, taking a deep breath, "I loved Richard. That would have been enough" (367). As in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai does not ascribe a specific identity to Balendran's sexual identification, but the narrator clearly emphasizes the importance of breaking the Mudaliyar's oppressive silence. The narrator describes the incident as being "like a tale of enchantment where the quester, by accidentally pronouncing the magic words, causes the spell that binds him to fall away" (368). Shattering the familial cluster of silences which the Mudaliyar maintains – silences clouding Arul's exile, Arul's family's poverty, the Mudaliyar's past and present infidelities, and the injustices suffered by Balendran – Balendran realigns the organization of power and exposes the unfixed quality of heteronormative identities in his family.

Selvadurai, in both *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, ultimately resists miraculous, totalizing conclusions about the way in which sexual identifications are experienced and expressed. Despite Balendran's hard-won sense of freedom, he soon finds, in the days following his blow-up with his father, that "a feeling of dejection [takes] hold of him, as if he had reached a goal and found it curiously hollow" (380). He writes a letter to Richard, asking only for his friendship, and in the end "[straightens] his tie" and joins his family for his father's traditional birthday celebration (386). This relatively anti-climactic resolution of Balendran's sometimes-jubilant-but-more-often-terrified search for personal integrity

somewhat parallels the resolution of Arjie's relationship with Shehan. Though Arjie, because of the ethnic riots ravaging Sri Lanka in 1983, cannot return to an enlightened rendition of the status quo like Balendran can, he parts from Shehan undramatically, with love-making that is "almost passionless, uncoordinated and tentative, lacking synchronization" (310). Neither of Selvadurai's homosexual protagonists emerges as an agent of sexual revolution. Moreover, neither character offers radical new queer identities. Both Arjie and Balendran, however, succeed in disrupting the overlapping discourses and agents of oppression which dominate their immediate circumstances. Both *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens* explore the past as sources for valuable insight, and free readers from its potentially binding legacy. Selvadurai shows that though the weight of unexamined tradition is often used for heteronormative justification, history itself never offers nor demands one truth, particularly not a heterosexist one. While he does not portray newly-liberating identities in his fiction, Selvadurai maps the way in which processes of identification and desire, by any or by no name, are shaped, but not bound by the identities created in past regimes of power, and he asserts that identifications and desires in the future do not need to be bound by the heterosexism of today.

Chapter II

NATIONS UNSETTLED: CRITIQUES OF NATIONALISMS AND THE STATE IN SELVADURAI'S FICTION

Focusing on characters' immediate circumstances in my first chapter, I explored how Shyam Selvadurai's characters generate play between competing, overlapping discourses to undermine self-naturalizing heterosexist oppression. As I argue extensively in that chapter, *Cinnamon Gardens'* Balendran and *Funny Boy's* Arjie are only able to tend to their sexuality by managing their inner desires and imaginations while negotiating the various normalizing social scripts generated in their local communities. The balance between an external, socially intelligible identity and a potentially contradictory inner identity is also, Selvadurai shows in his fiction, a dynamic which plays out on the level of the nation. As Partha Chatterjee explains in several of his texts, many anticolonial nations have histories of adopting Western, external, performative identities and developing "authentic," internal, essentialized identities as a strategy for resisting totalizing colonial powers. While the paradigms of early-twentieth-century nationalism and current struggles for homosexual rights may be comparable on an abstract level, however, the material manifestations of national and homosexual identity have a history of clashing in Sri Lanka: identities emphasizing non-normative genders and sexualities have been excluded from the imagination of the nation. While the cultivation of a national identity eased Ceylon's transition from a state of colonial rule to a state of anticolonial nationhood, this development allowed exclusionist logic to institute an implicit hierarchy of citizenship in Ceylon, and later, Sri Lanka.

Benedict Anderson argues as a general premise of *Imagined Communities* that nations inevitably limit themselves by processes of inclusion and exclusion. Although the 1931 Donoughmore Reforms, which granted universal franchise to Ceylon, attempted to ensure that the principle of representation would characterize what would later become the Sri Lankan nation, Selvadurai shows that inclusion and exclusion from the Sri Lankan nation are instead determined by calcified heterosexist and ethnic identities. Selvadurai demonstrates that the logic of essentialized ethnic and sexual national identity in an established nation-state is dangerous because it dictates and punishes, rather than reflects and protects, the identities to which its citizens lay claim. Beyond being neglected from the national imaginary, certain identities, such as homosexual identities, are actively disavowed in the nation's self-vision. Selvadurai, in critiquing the Sri Lankan nation, thus rejects ethnicity as the prime axis of national identity. While the logic of ethnic-nationalism is inherently flawed in its rationalization of chauvinistic, violent ethnic exclusion within the nation-state, its crushing dominance as a criterion for identity also prevents questions about its citizens' other possible identities from ever arising. While there is not a series of exact binary oppositions and equal terms offered in the discourses of ethnicity, nation, and sexuality, Selvadurai's novels expose overlapping fields of discrimination in Sri Lankan nationalist consciousness which contribute to the rejection of non-normative sexualities.

Though deeply infused with gendered figures of speech, nationalist discourse rarely overtly orients itself along the axis of sexual identity. Particularly in contexts where differing nationalisms are the basis of violent contestations for state power – for example, in contemporary Sri Lanka – nationalisms are, more frequently, bolstered by essentialized ethnic identities. That the sphere of ethnic-national identity has remained largely unaffected

by possible variations in the sphere of sexual identity is made clear by Rajiva Wijesinha who strongly criticizes heterosexist reviews of *Funny Boy* in “Aberrations and Excesses: Sri Lanka Substantiated by the *Funny Boy*.” Wijesinha, a writer who has created minor homosexual characters in his fiction, nonetheless implicitly illustrates the incompatibility of national and sexual politics in Sri Lanka in his commentary. He argues that the portrayal of homosexuality in “Pigs Can’t Fly” creates the impression that Selvadurai “is dealing with strange exoticisms that are of no great concern to the average reader,” an impression that “cannot of course be said about the chapters that deal with the ethnic issue and the violence that has accompanied it” (348). While Wijesinha conveys a sense of the gulf that has separated these two issues in Sri Lanka, Selvadurai’s fiction takes a unique approach in positing that national and sexual modes of identification and discrimination are not as utterly discrete as they might first appear. In a project intertwined with his challenge to the immutable stability of heteronormative identities, Selvadurai subversively exposes the relatively recent history of blended ethnic and nationalist identities, despite the popular and fervent essentialization of “authentic” primordial ethnic-nationalist identities.

Before I deal directly with Selvadurai’s fiction, I will record the extent to which heterosexism is deeply and tightly woven into both Sri Lankan law and public consciousness to contextualize Selvadurai’s rally against the heterosexism of the contemporary nation-state. While Selvadurai’s battle with Sri Lankan nationalism gives strength and inspiration to movements based in non-normative gendered and sexualized identities across several nations, nation-specific penal codes and differently localized public attitudes mean that no two nations advance heterosexist agendas in precisely the same way. A discussion of Sri Lankan national heterosexism can be helpfully explained with reference to Antonio

Gramsci's "The Formation of Intellectuals" which theorizes the two fundamental processes by which a state can assert and sustain dominance: through hegemony and forcible coercion. The term "hegemony," Gramsci writes, describes "The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (277). Although Serena Tennekoon focuses solely on the manufacture of ethnic consciousness in "Newspaper Nationalism: Sinhala Identity as Historical Discourse," her argument about Sri Lankan newspapers' central role in manipulating heavily-politicized public consciousness highlights this medium as a key site for hegemonic development. The counterpart to this breeding of common sense is, according to Gramsci, "The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively" (277). On the local level, this disciplinary apparatus is manifest in the actions of the police who are responsible for arresting criminals and laying charges against them. As one process provides the ongoing rationale and support for the other's action in carrying out a heterosexist agenda, these two avenues are not disassociated from one another. Heterosexist opinions generated by the media are given moral rationale by the law, and actions carried out by the police against homosexuals – whether legal or illegal – are often applauded by the media. The obvious result of this self-legitimizing cycle is that homosexuals become considered second-class citizens as they are scorned in the public consciousness and punished in accordance with national law.

The official homophobia enmeshed in the fabric of the nation can be located in Section 365A of the current Sri Lankan Penal Code. This section states:

Any person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any person of any act of gross indecency with another person, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years or with a fine, or with both and where the offence is committed by a person over eighteen (18) years of age in respect of any person under sixteen (16) years of age shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term not less than 10 years and not exceeding 20 years and with a fine and shall also be ordered to pay compensation of an amount determined by court to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed for the injuries caused to such a person. (“Sexual Offenses Laws – Sri Lanka”)

The original version of this law – enacted under British colonial rule in 1883 – refrained from naming homosexuality because of the fledgling status of homosexual identity in the late 19th century. The current law criminalizing homosexuality, however, is written in language that also avoids naming the specificity and legitimacy of homosexual identities. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s argument about significant silences in *The Epistemology of the Closet*, an argument which I employed in my first chapter to analyze Arjie’s and Balendran’s family dynamics, is again relevant here. That the Sri Lankan nation-state supports a heterosexist perspective was boldly asserted in 1995 when, in response to lobbying from several feminist groups, the wording of Section 365A was altered. Sagara Palihawadane, representative from Companions on a Journey, Sri Lanka’s first homosexual-rights organization, explains that the change is perceptible only to those familiar with the original law. The government amended Section 365A as part of a response to feminist activists who were pushing for increased legal protection for potential victims of rape, abortion-related violence, and incest (Palihawadane Email). While the nation-state altered the law to accommodate these demands, it also decided – despite the fact that the feminist groups’ demands did not deal with homosexual persecution – to alter the law so that lesbians, as well as gay men, could be prosecuted under Section 365A. Whereas the law once prohibited “any act of gross indecency with another

man,” after 1995, it criminalized “any act of gross indecency with any other person” (Palihawadane Email). Paradoxically, the broadening of language to accommodate new identities while simultaneously refusing to acknowledge those identities emphasized the smothering silence with which homosexuals are considered in the official Sri Lankan nation. The obfuscating language of Section 365A embodies Sedgwick’s observation that “ignorance effects can be harnessed, licensed, and regulated on a mass scale for striking [heterosexist] enforcements” (5). Though the bulk of the language in Section 365A is limited to a 19th century construction of homosexuality, its recent amendment represents a deliberate exclusion of homosexual men and women from within Sri Lanka’s bounds.

While the legislative body and disciplinary apparatus of the nation-state are responsible for sustaining the official exclusion of homosexuality in Sri Lanka, a heterosexist consensus in the consciousness of Sri Lankan citizens is also maintained through non-governmental channels. One such forum for molding the day-to-day “awareness” of the nation is the nation’s newspapers. The opinions printed in Sri Lankan papers are not completely heterosexist – *Funny Boy*, for example, was received with a large number of positive reviews (Palihawadane Email). As the following case illustrates, however, when heterosexism does surface in the media, its force is unrestrained.

One of the most notorious controversies concerning public, sanctioned homophobia arose in Sri Lanka when a reader of *The Island*, a major daily, wrote an editorial letter to protest a potential Companions on a Journey lesbian conference that had been mentioned in a previous day’s newspaper. In his extensive letter, published on August 20, 1999, P. Alles called for the police to “round up a sizeable collection of convicted rapists and let them loose among the jubilant but jaded jezebels when their assembly is in full swing, so that

those wanton and misguided wretches may get a taste of the zest and relish of the real thing” (Alles qtd. in “National Press Council Calls Lesbianism ‘An Act of Sadism’”). That one individual has such atrociously heterosexist views is less surprising, perhaps, than the fact that the publisher decided to print the letter. While such acts of hegemonic influence are not “brainwashing,” the events which followed the publishing of the letter asserted the slant of Sri Lanka’s dominant consciousness when popular opinion, homophobia, and national discourse coalesced.

Following the publication of the letter, Sherman de Rose, founder of *Companions on a Journey*, filed an official complaint with the National Press Council against *The Island*, claiming that the letter was an offence against the dignity and safety of Sri Lanka’s homosexual population, and, in its celebration of violence and rape, was a violation of both Sri Lankan Press Law and the Code of Ethics for Journalists. In their lengthy response to de Rose’s complaint – published in *The Island* on June 2, 2000 – the National Press Council not only protected *The Island’s* heterosexist position, but engaged in their own deeply heterosexist rhetoric that emphasized the “illegal, immoral, and obscene” character given to lesbianism in national discourse (qtd. in “Sri Lankan’s Media Complaint Backfires”). The National Press Council not only cited Section 365A to point out that homosexuality is illegal in Sri Lanka, but also cited Article 27 (12) of the Sri Lankan Constitution to rule that, as the family is the basic unit of society, homosexuals – who, in the Council’s imagination, are incapable of comprising a family unit – are unwelcome in the Sri Lankan nation state (“Sri Lankan’s Media Complaint Backfires”). Besides which, the Council further argued, Alles’s letter did not display “malice or grudge,” except toward “the spreading social menace” represented by lesbians, those “misguided and erratic women [who] should be corrected and

allowed to understand the true sense and reality of life” (qtd. in “Sri Lankan’s Media Complaint Backfires”). They concluded by stating that de Rose, as a male, had no legal standing to argue a case on behalf of women; with no legal standing and because he clearly was not arguing in “public interest,” de Rose not only failed to secure a victory over the newspaper, but was ordered to pay 2,100 rupees (\$33 Cdn) to *The Island* because in attempting to protect lesbianism he “[was] the one who [was] eager to promote sadism and salacity, not the respondents” (qtd. in “Sri Lankan’s Media Complaint Backfires”). While the initial letter may have represented the opinion of only one person, the circulation of this opinion in the newspaper represented an effort to manufacture support for a heterosexist perspective across a large readership. Moreover, though only one newspaper published this letter, its decision to do so was actively applauded and defended by the National Press Council. The extent to which the National Press Council supports this dominant heterosexist perspective can be seen in the arguments which it used to protect *The Island*. Though a strategy of defending the right to free speech was briefly employed, The National Press Council spent much more energy attacking homosexuality by situating it distinctly outside of the limits of Sri Lanka’s imagined national community.

While the Sri Lankan nation-state’s recently-rejuvenated stance against homosexuality is, in itself, the direct source of much discrimination and violence, Selvadurai’s novels illustrate how such a heterosexist agenda is symptomatic of certain kinds of nationalist logic. He challenges contemporary nationalism as a sphere in which ethnic identities have become privileged and essentialized while non-heteronormative sexual identities have been utterly foreclosed. A useful starting place for discussing this aspect of Selvadurai’s work is with Chatterjee’s analyses of the development of nationalism in Bengal

and India. Chatterjee's ideas illuminate my readings of both *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, but where *Funny Boy*, set in the late twentieth century, builds on premises which resonate with Chatterjee's conclusions, *Cinnamon Gardens*, which inspects the early development of Sri Lanka's nationhood, offers alternative insights about nation-formation. My discussion of *Funny Boy* takes for granted that, while not all Sri Lankans are Sinhalese, the formal Sri Lankan nation-state has essentialized Sinhalese ethnicity at the centre of its identity. While Chatterjee focuses on Bengal and India, not on Sri Lanka, his explanation of how ethnicity and "traditional" culture become essentialized is helpful in that it opens discussion of nation and identity beyond the scope of formal politics and shows how seemingly un-political identities are implicit in the agenda of the nation. My analysis of *Cinnamon Gardens*, a novel set in 1927 and 1928, builds on my Chatterjee-inflected discussion of *Funny Boy*: this section of my chapter shows how Selvadurai undermines the essentialized character of the contemporary nation by arguing that, though the modern manifestation of the nation excludes homosexuality, the founding principles on which it is based demand that its logic be reconsidered.

In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee continues the discussion he began in his landmark text *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* by discussing how the developments of African and Asian national imaginations exceed the limits of universalist, Eurocentric nation-theory as demarcated by Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. Where Anderson posits a formulaic theory of nation which emphasizes the "modular," Euro-derivative, mimicked quality of African and Asian nationalisms, Chatterjee argues that "The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the "modular" forms of the national society

propagated by the modern West” (*Fragments* 5). Chatterjee studies how this difference is cultivated as a pure, internal nationalism which is set in opposition to and deliberately stylized to remain unaffected by the performative mimicry of Westernized formal politics.

By using a theoretical frame which establishes a dichotomy between performative and essentialized national identity, Chatterjee’s work also complements Bhabha’s “mimic man” model of colonial power. While Bhabha considers that possible subversion might be effected in the performative arena, it is not within the scope of his postmodern approach to locate the tangible forms of such subversions or the ensuing identities that have emerged from such situations in particular histories. One significant overlap between the theorists, however, is their shared focus on how identities are shaped by systems of authority. Bhabha writes, “Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire”; he reminds readers that the disruptive potential of mimicry works by “rais[ing] the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations” (90). Chatterjee’s work thus extends from Bhabha’s in that, along with considering how colonial authority to define African and Asian identities was displaced, it also traces the corresponding development of domestic identities which are the means and the consequence of subversive action. While in my first chapter I used an abstracted “mimic man” paradigm to describe a subversive position, my discussion of *Cinnamon Gardens* shows how the echelon of “mimic men” in the historical context of Sri Lankan colonial power and national liberation was also an extension of colonial power. Just as Selvadurai’s characters dislodge heterosexist naming-authority while exploring non-normative identifications, Chatterjee theorizes that nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist projects in Africa and Asia

worked to dislodge the pre-eminence of the colonial arsenal of identities by exploring newly-possible domestic identifications.

Chatterjee's central premise, which allows him to see beyond the limits of Anderson's modules and which resonates brightly with Selvadurai's own project of nation-scrutiny, extends explanations of nation-formation beyond the formal political realm. In *Fragments*, he writes, "The difficulty [of nation studies], I am now convinced, arises because we have all taken the claims of nationalism to be a *political* movement much too literally and much too seriously" (5). Though here he identifies nation-theory's problem as taking formal politics "too seriously," in "The Nationalist Resolution to the Women's Question" Chatterjee more productively argues that nation-theory's weakness has been not taking other forms of nationalism seriously enough. Chatterjee's historical-theoretical work and Selvadurai's literary texts dovetail in that they both raise questions about the roles of seemingly non-politicized identities at key points in nation-development. Chatterjee does not ask questions of the nation's sexual orientation, but he does query the relationship between the rise of nationalism and the seemingly unrelated demise of agitation over "the women's question" which had been an active movement in pre-independent Bengal (233). The nationalist project, Chatterjee argues, did not address "the women's question" in its formal political realm, nor did it simply obliterate concerns about women's roles in society through forcible coercion. Instead, the nationalist movement actively absorbed and reinvested the energy of "the women's question" into new nationalist feminine identities which were as important to the formation of the nation as formal, Western political identities.

Although he does not explicitly invoke Bhabha, Chatterjee also explains that under colonial conditions of rule, the identities of the colonized were faced with the threat of being

reduced to the British-imposed partial presence of the “mimic man.” As the possibility of an independent nation-state approached, there was consensus among the colonized in Bengal that national identity “could not mean the imitation of the West in every aspect of life, for then the very distinction between the West and the East would vanish – the self-identity of national culture would itself be threatened” (“Women’s Question” 237). The people of Bengal thus needed an assertion of national identity that would remain unaffected by British political and cultural forms, what R. Radhakrishnan in “Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity” terms the forcibly imposed “Western blueprints of reason, progress and enlightenment” (85). Chatterjee theorizes that this gap was filled by the development of an essentialized, non-Western, seemingly non-performative identity based on a “superior spiritual culture” (“Women’s Question” 239). The complementary modes of performative Western and essentialized Eastern identity, he argues, interacted along the axis of gender. A gendered organization of national identity thus solved two potential crises simultaneously as the threat of an external, performative, colonially-imposed, masculine national identity was neutralized by the emergence of an essentialized, spiritual, indigenous-but-modern feminine identity (“Women’s Question” 238). Chatterjee stresses that this gendered organization of nationalism took root and expressed itself in “every aspect of the spiritual and material culture” (238). Not only was there “a reconstructed ‘classical’ tradition” and “modernized folk forms,” but feminine national modernity became reflected and asserted in women’s non-Westernized fashion, food, and education (237). Moreover, nationalism’s answer to “the women’s question” did not confine women to the physical home, but facilitated their interaction with the outside world by providing social scripts which “made it possible for

[them] to go out into the world under conditions that would not threaten [their] femininity” (“Women’s Question” 248).

While Chatterjee theorizes that national and female identities in Bengal were mutually informing, the relationship between national and homosexual identity, as evidenced by Sri Lanka’s laws, are clearly not as compatible. Though she deals with the abstract “nation” rather than specific aspects of Sri Lankan nationalism, Gayatri Gopinath, writing about “Pigs Can’t Fly” in “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion,” points out that “Heterosexuality . . . is fundamental to the way in which the nation imagines itself” (469). To develop this point, Gopinath quotes M. Jacqui Alexander’s “Erotic Autonomy As a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Industry”:

The nation has always been conceived in heterosexuality, since biology and reproduction are at the heart of its impulse. The citizenship machinery is also located here, in the sense that the prerequisites of good citizenship and loyalty to the nation are simultaneously sexualized and hierarchalized into a class of good, loyal, reproducing heterosexual citizens, and a subordinated, marginalized class of non-citizens. (469)

That heterosexuality is “at the heart of [the nation’s] impulse” is certainly coded in Sri Lankan ethnic-nationalism, which combines narratives of heterosexual origin and lineage with the specific territory of Sri Lanka.

Selvadurai illustrates the reciprocal relationship between essentialized ethnic-national identities and presumed heterosexuality many times throughout *Funny Boy*, but he draws the convergence most succinctly in the story “The Best School of All.” This story works towards Selvadurai’s overarching goal of laying a foundation for possible gay representation in the national imaginary by illustrating how homosexual identities are currently excluded by

dominant forms of Sri Lankan nationalism. At the climax of the story, *Funny Boy's* protagonist, Arjie, commits his most dramatic subversive act by misperforming two poems which are central to a school assembly. The intersection of sexuality, nation, and ethnicity surfaces when Arjie's delivery is prefaced by a group of students performing a short play. The players perform the Sinhalese myth of origin, wherein Prince Vijaya, "the father of the Sinhalese nation," comes to Sri Lanka from India to conquer the indigenous people and to rule in Sri Lanka (479). Though limited to the barest of details, Arjie's description of the play hinges on the fact of Vijaya's "conquest of Kuveni, the Yaksha princess" (479). Representing this double conquest – of land and of woman – the Sinhala Drama Society performs the essentialized roots of their ethnic and national identity.

Selvadurai's use of Arjie's young perspective limits what he can explicitly convey of the Vijaya narrative's multiple significations. Selvadurai does hint at the national significance of the story by situating its performance immediately after the national anthem, but he does not fully reveal the story's full political currency. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in "Through the Looking Glass Darkly: the Politics of Ethnicity," writes that the Vijaya story is valuable to Sinhalese culture because it represents the narrative of knowable, pure "Aryan" descent that is one of the cornerstones of Sinhalese ethnic identity (175-76). In establishing Vijaya as the first king of Sri Lanka and father of the Sinhalese nation, the story stresses the significance of heterosexual reproduction in sustaining "pure" community. The Vijaya story further instills a heterosexual principle by describing Vijaya's own transcendent ancestry.

Coomaraswamy explains that the Buddhist chronicle *the Mahavamsa* narrates that Vijaya was descended from a lion-grandfather who abducted and had intercourse with Vijaya's princess-grandmother (175). R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, in "The People of the Lion: Sinhala Identity

and Ideology in History and Historiography,” also notes that their son – Vijaya’s father – was commended extensively for his bravery after he killed the lion that had deserted the princess grandmother and ravaged villages to find his children (48). The fact of this sacred lineage is even implicit in the name “Sinhala”: “Sinhala,” the name given to Vijaya and his followers, is derived from the Pali word “Sīhala,” meaning lion (49). Moreover, although Vijaya and his followers were not Buddhist, the story is enshrined in a Buddhist text along with narratives of how, prior to Vijaya’s journey, Sri Lanka had been visited and declared sacred by the Buddha, how the Buddha had specially blessed Vijaya’s venture, and how the Buddha died on the day Vijaya landed (Coomaraswamy 175-177). Because the “pure” ethnic identity of the Sinhalese, recorded in Buddhist texts, is also explicitly connected with the particular territory of Sri Lanka and a position of dominance over other ethnic groups on the island, religious, national, ethnic, and heterosexist identities are all inextricably interlaced to create the ethnic-nationalism represented by the Vijaya story. While it does not explicitly speak against homosexuality, the story’s heavy emphasis on the duty of upholding Sinhalese lineage implicitly demands heterosexuality.

The school-assembly performance of the Vijaya narrative, with its implicit significance of essentialized sexual-ethnic-nationalist identity, is thus a subtle backdrop which further complicates Arjie’s act of resistance. As I describe in chapter one, Arjie’s performance in this scene is of central importance to the politics of the school, which are a microcosm of national conflicts between Tamils, Sinhalese, and British colonial legacy. Black Tie, the cruel, British colonial-style headmaster of The Queen Victoria Academy is, like Arjie, Tamil, but his multi-religious, multi-ethnic school policy is being threatened by the vice-principal, the nationalist Mr. Lokubandara who wants to make the school Buddhist.

“Since all Buddhists are Sinhalese,” Arjie’s lover Shehan explains at one point, “that means the school would be a Sinhala school, and there would be no place for Tamils in it” (220). The scene of the school assembly, with an audience of not only students and faculty, but also of parents and a prominent politician, is Black Tie’s final opportunity to make a case for the school’s non-sectarian organization. His speech depends on the quality of Arjie’s performance as a model young Sri Lankan citizen. As I discuss in chapter one, Arjie deliberately mangles his performance of the poems, destroying Black Tie’s chance to make his appeal in revenge for the cruel punishments which Black Tie had repeatedly inflicted on Arjie’s lover, Shehan.

Although I argue elsewhere that this scene offers a rejection of a certain model of heteronormative masculinity, Arjie’s refusal to comply with Black Tie’s performance also rejects a model of nation that offers too-limited identities. Given that Black Tie is a Tamil explicitly interested in maintaining the presence of Tamil students at the Queen Victoria Academy, Arjie’s subversion seems to signify a rejection, or, at least, a sacrifice of his Tamil ethnicity. This subordination is emphasized because Arjie knows that his actions will yield tangible consequences against Tamils in the school’s political battle. Mr. Sunderlingam, the teacher responsible for teaching Arjie the poems, cautions Arjie that if Black Tie is overthrown, “Tamils like us will suffer. Our loyalties must therefore be with him” (246). Though his act thus signifies as an act of treachery against Tamil ethnicity – an act which ultimately elevates the power associated with the Sinhalese ethnic absolutism represented by the Vijaya narrative – Arjie’s misperformance casts the entire event in a farcical light. The heterosexist roots of ethnic absolutism which are emphasized in the Vijaya performance are, at least temporarily, undercut by Arjie’s interruption of the assembly’s coherence. Beyond

resisting the particular narratives and loyalties of different ethnicities, moreover, Arjie's act is a refusal to participate in the pageantry of the British colonial, non-ethnicity-based "ideal" Sri Lankan nation. Given that this ideal is so cruelly enforced by Black Tie in his management of the students, at one point, Arjie contemplates, "I was not sure that, as a Tamil, my loyalties were with Black Tie" (247). Although Black Tie is Tamil, Arjie's actions, secretly inspired by his choice to avenge his lover, are interpreted by Black Tie only as a total breakdown of good citizenship. Furious at Arjie's "mistake," Black Tie takes the stage and rants into the microphone, "This young man is a prime illustration of what this country is coming to, of the path down which this nation is being led . . .," before suddenly breaking off to collect himself (282). Though Black Tie never comes to understand that Arjie's act is not only a disruptive act, but also an act of identification and solidarity, he clearly establishes that Arjie's non-complicity with his national project excludes him from his idealized realm of "the nation." As can be seen in the complicated network of tensions in this scene, there is no single direct opposition between ethnicity and nation, ethnicity and sexuality, or nation and sexuality, but there are deeply-embedded volatile conflicts in Sri Lankan culture between various constellations of all of these elements.

While Selvadurai portrays the tangle of relations between various Sri Lankan sexual, ethnic, and nationalist identities in "The Best School of All," he actually aligns these identities in "Small Choices." To be more precise, Selvadurai draws attention to the violent manifestations of exclusionary logic which characterize both heterosexist and ethnic-nationalist logic. As well as implicitly aligning these two sets of values, he continues to destabilize the primary function accorded to ethnic identity in the Sri Lankan nation by showing how, despite its apparent fundamental quality, it can be a mere mask for or result of

economic forces. “Small Choices” tells of how the Chelvaratnam family, a cluster of economically-legitimized, “good” citizens, is forcibly assigned a politically- and socially-disenfranchised “outsider” status, ostensibly because of their Tamil ethnicity.

The story “Small Choices” begins with Mr. Chelvaratnam’s bourgeois faith that citizenship, irrespective of ethnicity, is secure for all Sri Lankans with money. Newton Gunasinghe explains in “The Open Economy and Its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka” that from 1977 to 1983 – the period coinciding with *Funny Boy*’s chronology – Sri Lanka underwent massive changes as “the country’s economic structure was overhauled with the introduction of an open economic policy” (198). The previous economic phase which had shaped the nation, from 1956 to 1977, was not socialist, Gunasinghe explains, though it is often described as such. Instead, it was a period in which Sinhala businesses and workers received preferential state sponsorship and protection (202). When the economy of preferred ethnicity was removed, Sinhala middle-level businesses were “adversely affected” and “the dissatisfied sections of the urban poor constituted a volatile social base, capable of being mobilised . . . by the ideologists of Sinhala dominance as well as by frustrated sections of Sinhala entrepreneurs” (213). Selvadurai establishes in the earlier story “See No Evil, Hear No Evil” that Mr. Chelvaratnam, of Tamil ethnicity, actively celebrates Sri Lanka’s development of “the free economy” and “the end of socialism” as an upper-middle-class investor by entering into a hotel partnership with his Sinhalese friend (102). Ethnic difference seems to have become invisible in Mr. Chelvaratnam’s life as the Paradise Beach Resort runs successfully. His sense of inclusion becomes dismantled, however, as the economic conditions which constitute this inclusion are displaced by the community’s violent reassertion of ethnic criteria.

Jegan, the Tamil son of Mr. Chelvaratnam's best childhood friend, arrives to visit and is hired to work in the hotel as a senior inspector. When Jegan begins working, however, he senses resentment from the largely-Sinhalese staff. Mr. Chelvaratnam tries to soothe Jegan's trepidation by arguing that the exclusion he is feeling in the sphere of ethnicity can be offset by the inclusion and gratification bestowed by economic success. Selvadurai invites comparison between the effectiveness of Arjie's clumsy closeted approach to his nascent sexuality and Mr. Chelvaratnam's advocacy for semi-inclusion: "As a Tamil you have to learn to play the game. . . . Go around quietly, make your money, and don't step on anyone's toes" (173). Just as Arjie eventually bumps up against the limits of this approach in preventing sexualized discrimination, Jegan is overwhelmed by the ethnic discrimination which increasingly poisons his life. Moreover, the Chelvaratnams' confidence in their citizenship, supported by their highly-respectable class position, disintegrates as they become targets of the community's ethnic hostility.

Because Jegan had formerly cultivated Tamil-separatist affiliations, he becomes implicated when a political assassination by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam takes place in town. He is ultimately cleared of the charges, but not before the local newspaper has turned the story of his arrest and his close ties to Arjie's family into sensationalized front-page news. As the Chelvaratnam family becomes vulnerable, the hotel staff sabotages the Paradise Beach Resort by scaring away guests with violent messages scrawled on the hotel walls. While the media influences the hotel staff, the Sinhalese employees are also provoked to action by the very "anti-Tamil" Banduratne Mudalali, another member of the local elite whose hotels are in competition with the Paradise Beach Resort. Arjie describes him as "The only rich person in town" and the one who owns most of the hotels (170). The violence

against the Chelvaratnams, then, initiated by the Mudalali's thugs on this and on previous occasions, is inspired by the envy of a business competitor exploiting the workers' internalized ethnic-national prejudices. Ironically, though the power of capital initially enables Mr. Chelvaratnam to transcend ethnic-nationalist discourse, the power of the Banduratne Mudalali's capital subjects Mr. Chelvaratnam to the workers' ethnic-nationalist identities.

Rather than tighten the bonds within the Chelvaratnam family and with Jegan, the Chelvaratnams' dismissal from the larger community splits their opinions about the value of belonging to a nation whose welcome can so quickly evaporate. Arjie's father stubbornly retains his faith in his prized economic citizenship, and though it crushes their young guest, Mr. Chelvaratnam fires Jegan in a feeble attempt to placate his workers and regain their respect. Arjie's mother, on the other hand, responds to the trouble caused at the hotel by decidedly intensifying her identification with Tamil ethnic-nationalism. To the incredulity of Arjie's father, Arjie's mother argues, "Maybe these Tigers and their separate state are not such a stupid idea, after all" (190). Though Mrs. Chelvaratnam initially identifies emotionally with Tamil ethnic-nationalism, however, she soon turns from such absolutist logic. She decides that instead of supporting the Eelam movement or remaining vulnerable to the threat of violence for the sake of economic gratification, it would be preferable to escape the violently exclusionist logic altogether by moving to Canada or Australia (195). Selvadurai escalates the Chelvaratnams' sense of displacement soon after Jegan leaves the site of conflict. As election-season approaches, the emphatically Sinhalese government proposes that their term of power should be extended for six years without an election. When Arjie's parents go to vote against the illegal proposal in a referendum, "A member of parliament

arrive[s] with his thugs, [holds] the voting officials at gunpoint, and proceed[s] to stuff the ballot boxes with false ballots” (207). The Chelvaratnams’ disempowerment thus resonates at the national level as they are bulldozed by the overarching drive for power carried out in the name of a combative ethnic identity.

In “Small Choices,” Selvadurai focuses much more explicitly on the tensions and inconsistencies between economic and ethnic legitimations of national identity than on sexual exclusion, but commentary on all three streams is deeply interwoven. As I discuss in my first chapter, Jegan, a character deeply involved in struggles of ethnic identity, is a staunch defender of Arjie’s “funnyness.” When Mr. Chelvaratnam vaguely compliments him on what he perceives to be a corrective heteronormative influence, Jegan openly refuses to acknowledge any problem with Arjie’s character (166). Jegan’s sexual orientation is never revealed in this story, and by keeping it undetermined, Selvadurai introduces the possibility that Jegan’s empathy stems from his deeply-felt experiences of ethnic-nationalist exclusion. R. Raj Rao makes a similar observation about the characters’ solidarity in “Most People Marry Their Own Kind: A Reading of Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*.” Rao points out that “when Jegan’s terrorist connections are finally discovered . . . he sobs quietly in his room” in a way that anticipates “Arjie’s feelings in the next story on the discovery of his homosexuality” (122). I quoted Wijesinha earlier in this chapter to illustrate the division which even sympathetic Sri Lankan critics perceive between the queer and the ethnic-nationalist strands of *Funny Boy*. This trend was confirmed for me by Sagara Palihawadane from *Companions on a Journey* who writes that while narrative moments about sexual identity and experience were shocking to readers, readers were largely unfazed by Selvadurai’s representation of ethnic violence because they had experienced, first-hand, the

conflicts of ethnic-nationalism (Palihawadane Email). Consequently, by introducing the possibility of identification between Arjie and Jegan across different oppressive regimes, Selvadurai seeks to convert readers' empathy for the characters' ethnic-nationalist exclusion into an understanding of sexualized-nationalist exclusion. While Selvadurai's historically-attentive – at times, even, documentary-like – writing never “equates” these two types of injustices, “Small Choices” is rich with moments that connect experiences of suffering across similarly-oppressive and overlapping regimes.

My analyses of the stories in *Funny Boy* thus focus on Selvadurai's strategies of protest against the harsh exclusion carried out in the name of recent strands of ethnic-nationalism. *Funny Boy's* setting is an ideal backdrop for Selvadurai's project of clearing space for same-sex identifications by portraying characters who choose against heteronormative ethnic-nationalist logic. The period from 1977 to 1983 – during which Arjie grows from age seven to age fourteen – represents, unquestionably, the height of violent conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. During this period, when political and paramilitary actions were boldly carried out in the name of ethnic-nationalist identities, the logic of exclusionary nationalism was at its most dangerous and, as Mrs. Chelvaratnam's comment illustrates, most seductive stages. The political and social context in which *Funny Boy* takes place, then, is in itself a persuasive argument for de-essentializing and de-ethnicizing the nation's identity.

Continuing to unsettle the nation's current perception of its “true” identity in *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai revisits Sri Lanka's colonial past to remind readers that the emerging postcolonial Ceylonese nation-state was established on a central premise of universal representation, not on any particular identity. Rather than choose a moment when ethnicity first became inseparable from nation, for example in Sri Lanka's 1956 elections, or

even the moment when Sri Lanka first attained sovereignty in 1948, Selvadurai sets his second novel to coincide with the Donoughmore Commission of 1927 and the Donoughmore Report of 1928. This period, like the period covered by *Funny Boy*, is an ideal backdrop for Selvadurai's critique of "the nation." If, as Chatterjee argues in several of his texts, anticolonial nations were imagined by Africans and Asians as having an external, performative, Westernized political identity in tension with a modernized-traditional, internal, essentialized identity, the time of the Donoughmore Commission represents a crucial phase during which both external and internal levels of Ceylonese nationalism began to develop. This formative phase, during which varied groups in Ceylonese society scrambled to influence the shape of the emerging country, is thus an ideal period for Selvadurai to attend to the original representative principle in Sri Lanka's nascent nation, and how that quality might contribute to sexual tolerance today.

Chatterjee's theory of bifurcated external-internal nationalism does not map tidily onto *Cinnamon Gardens'* investigation of same-sex identifications and national identities, but the inability of this model to account for Selvadurai's project is instructive in its dissonances. For example, when Chatterjee discusses Indian nationalism, he can refer to a movement which overlooked the class and ethnic differences of the masses it represented. In "The Power of the Past," Jonathan Spencer points out that in India, the "political ambitions of the [middle-class] elite forced them to build an anti-colonial alliance with the population . . . using symbols and rhetoric which would, they hoped, appeal to all sections of the population" (9). Moreover, despite some degree of internal conflict, Spencer writes, "[Indian] Congress is still seen to some extent as the embodiment of the national political will" (9). In Ceylon, by contrast, the embryonic stages of nationalism did not work from the

premise of mass inclusion or representation. “In Sri Lanka,” Spencer writes, “there was no such mass struggle,” and “the colony was granted universal franchise in 1931 to the dismay of at least some elements within the political elite” (9). Though Ceylon did not attain independence until 1948, the machinery for a fully representative nation in a system of universal franchise became a necessary part of the imagined nation in Ceylon following the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission. Prior to the Donoughmore constitutional reforms, Kumari Jayawardena writes in *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, “franchise in Ceylon under the Order in Council of 1923 was a doubly restrictive one, being granted only to males possessing both literacy and property (or income) qualifications” (264). In terms of representation, elitist voting restrictions meant that, prior to 1931, only four percent of Ceylon’s citizens were legally entitled to vote (264). Selvadurai also continues to unsettle the primacy of ethnic-nationalist consciousness, which would eventually become deeply and dangerously linked with national politics, by making comparisons between the heteronormativity of the late 1920’s, tied up with the exclusionary logic of class-based politics, and the heteronormativity of contemporary politics, tied up with the logic of exclusionary ethnic-nationality. In taking this step, Selvadurai reaffirms that, historically, formal politics has been a major site of heterosexism, but he also relocates heterosexism outside of the nation. While nationalist politics are presently a major source of heterosexism, *Cinnamon Gardens* demonstrates that heterosexism is not necessarily inherent in the representative principle in which Sri Lankan nationalism is based.

Strengthening his critique of nationalism’s dismissal of queer identities, Selvadurai illustrates that the contemporary matrix of ethnic identities does not actually bear an ancient relationship to the evolution of the nation. It is true that, while colonial rule dominated

Ceylon in the early twentieth century, ethnic-religious cultural forms existed and religious gatherings were even a necessary forum for the expression of political dissent. Jayawardena explains that in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, the British would not tolerate any anti-British Ceylonese organizations, but they would tolerate anti-Christian politics.

Jayawardena writes that “demonstrations, petitions, and mass meetings were used as a means of expressing public opinion on religio-political issues like . . . the [anti-Christian missionary] Buddhist education campaign” (361). Ethnic and religious-based movements which had existed for centuries and provided semi-political forums did not, of course, disappear by the late 1920’s. At one point in *Cinnamon Gardens*, the character F.C. Wijewardina describes the tangle of conflicting interest groups clouding the Donoughmore Commission’s task.

Demarcating just some of the multiple identities and conflicts of interest, he lists “Up-country Sinhalese versus low-country Sinhalese, Karava caste versus Goyigama caste, Moors, Malays, Christian Tamils, Hindu Tamils, Buddhists, and so on and so on” (68). Richard Howland, Balendran’s lover and an independent English scholar reporting on the Commission, is simply “confused and bewildered by the numerous claims and counter-claims” of the various groups, and decides that the relationship structure of religious and ethnic identities is “bloody labyrinthine” (102-103). Despite the fact that these ethnicities inflected national politics at the time of the Donoughmore Commission, Selvadurai shows that they were not a primary governing force at this stage in the formation of the nation. Nationalism and ethnicity would eventually become nearly inseparable, but the intensity of the interweaving was a secondary effect, not an originating cause of national politics. Not only were ethnicities not the primary motivation for the development of nationalism, they did not even emerge as essentialized articulations of national identity until years after the

representative infrastructure for nationalism was inspired by the Donoughmore Commission.

In fact, Selvadurai traces how the politics of ethnicity, often existing alongside the politics of heteronormativity, were often organized by the politics of class and were antithetical to the politics of democratic nationalism in the late 1920's. As in *Funny Boy*, the various relations between differently identified characters do not comprise a series of binary oppositions, but the characters in *Cinnamon Gardens* who most exemplify hegemonic heterosexual masculinity and who feel driven to privilege ethnicity under of the pressure of impeding nationalism are, invariably, firmly opposed to the inclusion of the masses through universal franchise. The character who most thoroughly embodies such a convergence of values is Balendran's father, the Mudaliyar Navaratnam, whose violent heterosexism I discuss in chapter one. As an upper-middle-class, governor-appointed politician, the Mudaliyar enjoys considerable wealth and status under colonial rule. Jayawardena describes this strata of the middle class as made up of those who "constantly applauded the political blessings of British rule" and who "had come to be regarded and to regard themselves the crème de la crème of the Ceylonese" (72, 73). Through this character, Selvadurai makes the point that though heterosexism is currently a symptom of the nation, it also thrived in deeply anti-independence movements. The Mudaliyar loathes the idea of independence from Britain and hopes to shape the burgeoning nation by keeping it as British as possible. Under the impression that he can influence the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission, the Mudaliyar asks Balendran to approach Richard, a scholar from England who is visiting to study the Commission. Without any sense of or interest in Balendran's own political beliefs – which are firmly oriented towards both sovereignty and universal franchise – the Mudaliyar

gives Balendran strict instructions to convince Richard of the distastefulness of universal franchise and national independence (28-30). While the Mudaliyar has, in deference to the eventual likelihood of decolonization, begun drifting away from the Anglophile “Queen’s House Set” to make alliances with the Ceylon Tamil Association, Selvadurai shows that his implicit alliance of ethnicity and nation is not rooted in any sense of ethnic solidarity. Rather than being motivated by the desire to join or extend support to a Tamil-oriented community, the Mudaliyar’s political maneuver is prompted only by his fears that, should Ceylon gain independence without universal franchise, he will be minoritized as a Tamil and as a former member of the privileged “mimic man” class. Through the direction and momentum of this character’s political position, Selvadurai illustrates that, for a large number of the Anglophile middle-class in the late 1920’s, the politicization of Tamil identity was more of a class-driven defensive posture than the embodiment of an essentialized ethnic-nationalist dream. By disrupting the nexus of essentialized ethnic-nationalism, Selvadurai also chips away at the naturalized status of heterosexism within Sri Lanka’s modern ethnicized nation.

Selvadurai uses the convergence of political pressures in this part of the plot to emphasize the lack of available positive homosexual identities for men in the early development of the Ceylonese nation. Chatterjee, in “the Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” is able to demarcate particular forms of women’s identities which, though muted, came to be articulated as an essential aspect of the emerging Indian national imagination. In *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai deals with the ramifications of this social phenomenon through episodes which focus on Balendran’s niece, Annalukshmi. Through the character Annalukshmi, Selvadurai explores the highly-regulated “modern” identities which Ceylonese nationalism demanded of women. Through the character Balendran,

however, Selvadurai illustrates that where early-twentieth-century Sri Lanka offered identities to women which signified simultaneously in discourses of nation and gender, no non-heteronormative identities were incorporated in overlapping discourses of nation and sexuality. As can be seen in Chatterjee's tidy paradigm of masculine-performative-political and feminine-essentialized-traditional nation, the obligatory gendered identities offered by the nation – which, in turn, constitute the nation – presume a heterosexual schema and deny the presence of homosexuality in the make-up of the nation.

The Mudaliyar makes use of this paradigm to control his son even as he attempts to protect his political interests. Richard, twenty years before the novel's present, had been Balendran's lover until the Mudaliyar violently destroyed their relationship. Though the Mudaliyar does not mention his destruction of their relationship when he asks Balendran to reacquaint himself with Richard, Balendran understands that "This request was not simply about the Donoughmore Commission" (37). Balendran realizes that his father is offering him an opportunity to assert his heteronormativity by proving his political worth. The pressures of this plot-stream are reminiscent of when *Funny Boy's* Arjie must choose between delivering his poems properly, thereby privileging the network of filial-heteronormative-political identity, or mangling his delivery, thereby asserting solidarity with his lover. While Arjie ultimately chooses to identify with his lover in "The Best School of All," Balendran, at this point in *Cinnamon Gardens*, becomes sick and dizzy at the prospect of meeting Richard and, like his father, can only hope that "The Donoughmore Commission [will] regulate any bumps or gaps in their encounter" (37). While the political perspective which he is supposed to advance on behalf of his father is anti-nationalist, Balendran recognizes that under the presumed heterosexuality of formal politics, topics relating to sexuality are foreclosed.

Although he eventually aligns their perspective with a heterosexist agenda, Selvadurai first establishes that pro-national elites also framed themselves and their politics primarily in terms of social status. Though he is a member of the comprador class like Balendran's family, Balendran's friend F. C. advocates a different, "moderate" political outlook. Unlike their conservative Anglophile counterparts, "the moderates" agitated strongly for national independence from Britain, and various anticolonial associations organized around the nationalist goal came together in 1919 to form the Ceylon National Congress (Jayawardena 196). Like the Anglophile group, the demographics of the Ceylon National Congress membership bore a strong correlation to ethnic identity: where the ultra-privileged Anglophiles were mostly Ceylonese Tamil, the similarly-privileged members of the Ceylon National Congress were largely Sinhalese. However, the ethnicity of these groups was of secondary importance to their class: Spencer writes of the "the huge social and cultural gap which existed between the small elite of wealthy English-educated Sri Lankans – supposedly the natural representatives of their various 'races' [in the British perspective] – and the mass of the population" (9). While questions of ethnicity were, therefore, by no means irrelevant, the nationalist agenda of the Ceylon National Congress was not built in the first instance around an essentialized ethnic identity. Though the Ceylon National Congress' vision on the nation was passionately opposed to the Anglophiles' vision of the issue of independence, in 1927 the groups' political agendas were comparable in that they were both far more concerned with retaining their own elitist privileges than with weaving a nation around an ethnic core or a system of universal franchise. While not overtly organized around questions of sexuality, obsessions with power in Selvadurai's representation also intersect with deeply heterosexist attitudes.

F. C. Wijewardena, an old school friend of Balendran's, is the most vocal character in *Cinnamon Gardens* associated with the Ceylon National Congress, and his and Balendran's political differences are deep. Though F. C. is eager to enlist Balendran's support in the Congress, Balendran despises the Congress' belief in the systematic elitism of limited franchise and also perceives the potential threat of Sinhalese ethnocentrism which it represents. Nonetheless, on most social occasions, their political differences surface as heated, but friendly, repartee. The intensity of their political banter takes on a different tone entirely, however, after F. C. is secretly exposed to Balendran as the informer who had invoked the Mudaliyar's heterosexist wrath twenty years prior to the novel's present. Totally under his father's influence in the early pages of *Cinnamon Gardens*, Balendran had faith that formal political discourse could keep questions of non-normative sexual politics submerged. In confronting F. C., however, Balendran shows that, with neither a legitimate vocabulary nor a forum for articulating struggles of sexual identification and desire, his disempowerment is best displaced into the language of formal politics. Balendran and his wife are at F. C.'s house for dinner on the evening after F. C.'s betrayal is revealed to Balendran by Richard. When F. C. tries to tempt Balendran with the Congress's vision of national politics, Balendran explodes:

Your Congress is ultimately no different from the British. You want power to do exactly what the British have done. Come in on your high horse, think you know exactly what needs doing, meddle in other people's lives, make decisions for them, because, after all, aren't you superior to them, don't you know what's best? I have nothing but contempt for people like that. (166)

The role which F. C. played in the dismantling of Balendran's long-lost relationship with Richard does not, of course, bear a directly-intersecting relationship to his political stance.

Nevertheless, Balendran's use of political language to express his disempowered rage speaks to the silencing effect which national discourse has on heterosexist injustices.

While Selvadurai thus challenges heterosexist regimes through his critique of elitist national political positions, he also testifies to the lack of accommodation available to same-sex politics in the discourse of the nation. Reconfigured and newly-energized categories of gender sparked by the advent of South Asian nationalisms meant that women's identities signified simultaneously as both nationalist and feminine, but a lack of non-heterosexualized identities meant that men's nationalist activities, whatever their sexual orientation, only reinforced the masculine, heteronormative national project. Consequently, Balendran's efforts to promote abstract notions such as equality and mass representation, while resisting elitist politics and chauvinist ethnic agendas, still register heteronormatively. It is a difficult task for a writer to convey the absence of positive gay identity in "the nation" when "the nation" does not claim to and has historically refused to be inscribed with such politics. Nonetheless, Selvadurai manages to delineate this absence by setting Balendran's contributions to a developing nationalist identity in direct opposition to his relationship with his former lover. After Balendran, for fear of the pressures of a heteronormative culture, breaks apart from Richard for the second time in his life, he distances himself from his same-sex identifications by investing his energies in the national project.

Balendran does not involve himself in the formal politics of Congress-like nation-building, but he does submerge himself in anticolonial activities which develop the nation's internal character. Contributing to the external character of a budding Ceylon, Balendran shows sensitivity to the disenfranchisement of the labour classes by introducing labour reforms on the family rubber estate. Selvadurai's narrator emphasizes that Balendran's labour

reforms embody the principle of representation by describing how, despite their economic success, the reforms are “unpalatable” to both the European and Ceylonese elite (227). Contributing to the development of the internal character of the nation, Balendran embarks on a long-anticipated desire to write a book on Jaffna Tamil folk culture. He does not pursue this enterprise with a chauvinistic or over-essentializing agenda, but with a genuine curiosity and respect for the radical “variance of custom and language that appears from village to village” (228). The sincerity of this project is offset by the narrator’s earlier mention of a pompous book which the Mudaliyar had written, “The Splendours of the Glorious Tamil Tradition.” Balendran’s wife describes the Mudaliyar’s book as “atrocious” and extends her criticism to the way the Mudaliyar performed authoritative ethnic authenticity as he toured America, passing himself off as “a great Hindu sage” for “gullible Americans” (55). On the one hand, then, Balendran’s engagement in activities which comply with the injunctions of the developing nation is reminiscent of Bhabha’s theory of mimicry. By performing the role of the ideal national citizen in a way that is distinctly superior to his father’s arrogant, half-hearted efforts, Balendran, as a character who revels in same-sex desire, embodies a potential disruptive threat to the assumed heteronormativity of national discourse.

At the same time, however, Selvadurai emphasizes the historical incompatibility of non-normative sexuality and the nation by aligning Balendran’s performance of ideal national identity with his efforts to pave over his feelings for Richard. The narrator only describes Balendran’s dedication to these activities as part of his scheme to forget Richard and reassert his heteronormative lifestyle under the scope of his father’s power. The narrator brackets descriptions of Balendran’s nationalist activities with such explanations as, “In the four months that followed Richard’s departure, Balendran set himself with great

purposefulness to put aside the memory of his friend,” and, “by the time his wife returned from England, Balendran’s attempt to forget his friend had been an overwhelming success” (227, 228). By underwriting Balendran’s anti-elitist, positive national pursuits with descriptions of his sexual denial, Selvadurai testifies to the limits of national logic, illustrating that even in instances when it embodies principles of equality and balanced representation along ethnic and economic axes, it has a history of stonewalling sexual identities.

In *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai does not portray heterosexism as the result of any single early-century vision of the nation, be it as a colonial-derivative state, a limited franchise oligarchy, or mass-representative democratic community. Instead, he emphasizes the harshness with which exclusionary logic, manifest in any political ideology, can be exacted on vulnerable citizens, a harshness that because of hegemonic thinking often goes unexamined. Selvadurai’s subtle portrayal of particular manifestations of heterosexism in the early politics of the Sri Lankan nation acts as a plea to reconsider contemporary heterosexist assumptions and state participation in such attitudes. Situating his exploration at the time of the Donoughmore Commission is thus not an outright dismissal of the nation as a form of mass communal organization, but a reminder to readers that the key principle of Sri Lanka’s democratic nation is its responsibility to represent, not terrorize, its citizens. Though this principle is the cause of much conflict in the public Sri Lankan polity, it almost always signifies along the axis of ethnicity, and is frequently forgotten along the axis of sexuality.

In their conclusions, neither *Funny Boy* nor *Cinnamon Gardens* delivers a fully coherent representation of the nation. *Funny Boy* closes with the story “Riot Journal: an Epilogue,” in which Selvadurai reminds readers of how all positive spheres of identification were, for many people, overwhelmed by state-sponsored, ethnic mob violence in 1983. In Selvadurai’s

story, the Chelvaratnam household is identified as Tamil by Sinhalese mobs working with voter registration lists and the family house is completely destroyed. Although Arjie and his lover, Shehan, split up because of the disastrous material conditions created by ethnic violence and not because of any personal ethnic identifications, such identifications register in their breakup as Arjie notices for the first time within the context of their relationship that Shehan is Sinhalese while he is Tamil. A testament to the prior intensity of their love, this recognition appears ironically as Arjie and Shehan's hard-fought-for relationship fizzles away; though ethnic identities were inconsequential in their relationship, their relationship is made impossible by violent conditions carried out in the name of ethnic exclusion.

Selvadurai's criticism of the exclusionary fanaticism that has taken place in the name of the nation – especially when exercised with the support of the state – is not limited, however, to any one axis of identity in "Riot Journal." Arjie does not suffer exclusion only as a gay person, or only as a Tamil; his exclusion, whatever the intentions or rationale of the rioters, is total. As Arjie looks back on the remnants of his looted and burned-down house, the site becomes obliterated by a rain storm, an image that, in a reading focusing strongly on the nation, seems to finalize the impossibility of a home in such a nation.

The conclusion of *Cinnamon Gardens* does not present such a bleak final portrait of the nation, yet the hope that it offers for the present is balanced with its inevitable sense of inescapable compromise. The final chapter, titled "The Finale," is written as an epilogue: a period of three months has passed since the nine-month span of the novel's main events, and it is once again the Mudaliyar's birthday. As the time for the celebration approaches, Selvadurai presents a slightly-skewed portrait of the core unit of the nation, the heteronormative family, which asserts the presence of non-normative citizens in the early

stages of the nation's development. Although Balendran's family gathers as one cohesive entity to greet the arriving guests, the gleaming surface of the family's apparent solidarity only heightens the reader's ironic knowledge that the idealized appearance is belied by newly-configured non-normative power relations. Balendran has reunited with his wife, and as he straightens his tie, he once again engages the domestic heteronormative lifestyle that he has chosen over an overtly homosexual lifestyle. My next chapter celebrates Balendran's choice to stay in Ceylon against the backdrop of international queer politics; in a reading which focuses on the nation, however, the family collectivity portrayed in the tableau – resulting from some characters' sacrifice and other characters' defeat – encapsulates the shape of the Ceylonese nation in 1928. Selvadurai's narrator explains that the Donoughmore Recommendations have just been announced following the Commission's visit, and while their findings do not bring a victory for a Ceylonese sovereignty, the recommendations do bear promise. To Balendran's relief and the deflated hopes of most of the comprador class, the Commission does recommend universal franchise. In practice, universal franchise would, in later decades of Sri Lanka's sovereign development, allow for essentialized Sinhalese identity to emerge as the essentialized centre of the nation; essentialized Sinhalese ethnic-nationalism would in turn cause essentialized Tamil ethnicity to emerge as the justification for a violently sought-after alternative nation-state, Eelam. However, by concluding *Cinnamon Gardens* with the fresh birth of universal suffrage, Selvadurai attempts to inspire readers with the knowledge that the nation is founded on the principle of representation for all of its citizens, a principle which may one day afford the inclusion of citizens previously denied.

Chapter III

MAPPING DIASPORIC SOLIDARITIES AND SEXUALITIES

IN *FUNNY BOY* AND *CINNAMON GARDENS*

Interwoven with Selvadurai's extensive criticism of the nation-state is his exploration of "diaspora" as a means of navigating forces which threaten to target-and-oppress or assimilate-and-erase marginalized identities. Although I will, in this chapter, explore the challenge which South Asian queer diasporic identifications pose to dominant North American queer discourse, I will first sketch out the ways Selvadurai's writerly voice resonates in the South Asian Canadian literary landscape. Canadian diasporic positions do not have a strong presence in Selvadurai's texts on the level of plot, but attention to his "diasporic writerly position" is of paramount importance to analysis of his texts. Selvadurai's diasporic writerly position is constituted by where he "is," where he is "from," and how he negotiates the cultural overlaps and dissonances which arise from living in displacement. In my previous chapter, I explored the significance of where Selvadurai is "from" by analyzing his texts against the roots and contemporary manifestations of heterosexism and militant ethnic-nationalism in Sri Lanka. I will here provide a complementary discussion which recognizes Selvadurai amongst a community of South Asian Canadian writers. This outstanding group of artists is a leading example of what James Clifford describes in "Diasporas" as those "interpretive communities where critical alternatives [to systematic social injustices] can be expressed" (261). In working from and writing back into the in-between cultural spaces inhabited by diasporic groups, Selvadurai generates insightful

cultural critiques and establishes solidarities which speak across ethnic and nationalist boundaries. Because I have already addressed Selvadurai's close engagement with "the family" and "the nation" in a Sri Lankan context in my previous two chapters, I will, in this chapter, attend to the importance of Selvadurai's writing as diasporic articulations. Only by coming to Canada to distance himself from the cluster of threats which dominate minoritized ethnicities and homosexuals in Sri Lanka could Selvadurai create texts in such a vibrant South Asian literary environment which address his originary culture, engage transplanted and renegotiated South Asian communities, and critique the mainstream cultural narratives – particularly in regards to sexuality – in North American culture.

A preliminary step for my discussion of the diasporic aspects of Selvadurai's texts will include contextualizing his position as a South Asian writer in Canada. Although Canada appears only briefly in *Funny Boy* and not at all in *Cinnamon Gardens*, a pliable notion of diasporic identification is implicit in the South Asian Canadian position from which Selvadurai writes. While the focus of this thesis is Selvadurai's writing and not Selvadurai himself, it is helpful to situate his standing as a diasporic writer before proceeding with direct textual analysis. As Hall writes in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," "Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*" (222). Though not emphasized in his writing, Selvadurai's diasporic writerly position is crucial to the fact that his texts are able to present a balanced, imaginative portrayal of Sri Lankan life while engaging the highly controversial issues surrounding conflicts of ethnicity and sexuality. Chelva Kanaganayakam draws attention to the value of such distance in "Labels, Lives and the Poetics of Inclusion." Kanaganayakam observes that "Selvadurai's writing is about ethnic strife and sexual politics, and neither one is likely to

have found expression that readily in a Sri Lankan context. To be able to write about such issues with honesty requires the perspective and security of exile” (xiv-xv). Given the overwhelming hostility of the Sri Lankan nation-state towards homosexual men and women and the ever-present conflicts of ethnicity – both of which I detail in my second chapter – the diasporic insight gained through physical and cultural distancing is necessary for Selvadurai’s critically nostalgic representation of his originary country.

South Asian immigrants to Canada have produced literature for decades, but the critical recognition of a South Asian community of Canadian writers is a relatively recent phenomenon. William New testifies to the firm-yet-distinct presence of this community in “Papayas and Red River Cereal,” the introduction to a special South Asian Review issue of *Canadian Literature*. New writes that “there has been a lively literature written by South Asian immigrants to Canada since the earliest settlements at the beginning of the twentieth century,” and continues, “That Canadian critics should now be paying attention to the many connections between South Asia and Canadian literature is therefore less surprising than that it should have taken so long” (4). The history of a grounded-but-unrooted relationship between South Asian Canadian writing and mainstream Canadian literary criticism is also identified by Jamie James in “The Toronto Circle.” James describes how writer M. G. Vassanji and his wife, Nurjehan Aziz, upon arriving in Canada in the early 1980’s, were surprised by the abundance of South Asian voices and the contrasting lack of a forum for these voices. Vassanji and Aziz responded to this lack by creating *The Toronto South Asian Review* (TSAR). This journal broke ground by giving such writers as Rohinton Mistry, Ian Iqbal Rashid, and Vassanji himself their first opportunities to be published, and even launched Selvadurai’s career by printing “Pigs Can’t Fly,” the story which would, a few years

later, re-emerge as the kernel of *Funny Boy* (James). TSAR embodied the diasporic paradox as its South Asian identity in a Canadian context propelled it to firm success with a Canadian and international readership. The diasporic paradox intensified as, in its development, TSAR's South Asian identity became both concentrated and diffused: TSAR's name was eventually transferred to the book publishing house which evolved from the original journal – thereby increasing the stability and range of the South Asian Canadian literary platform – while the journal, taking on the title *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad*, shed its South Asian designation to more openly welcome writers who identify with other communities (TSAR Publications).

While Selvadurai's writing can thus be mapped in a Canadian location, it can also be seen as being in conversation with broader diasporic community. Specifically, Selvadurai's texts parallel currents of diaspora theory which call for reconsiderations of essentialized ethnic-nationalist "origins" by celebrating the role of narrative in maintaining community. By emphasizing the acts of narrative which maintain memories of and a sense of longing for a distanced home, Selvadurai's writing invites identification where an emphasis on essentialized ethnic-nationalist identities would effect exclusion. This aspect of Selvadurai's texts resonates with Hall's work in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" when Hall writes that diasporic identity is not attributable to "a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return" (226). Instead, in a line of thought which echoes my invocation of performative identity in earlier chapters, Hall writes that diasporic identity is always generated in processes of creation. Diasporic identity, Hall theorizes, is "always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (226). Similarly, Clifford paraphrases Paul Gilroy to assert the importance of "Identifications [instead of] identities" and "acts of

relationship rather than pregiven forms” (268). Finally, though her argument does not describe narrative as extensively as Hall’s, Floya Anthias also dismisses the centrality of fixed, literal origin in determining diasporic consciousness, writing that the factor “which binds [a diasporic group] together is an *attribution of origin*” (565, original italics). By harnessing the constitutive powers of narrative identified by theorists such as Hall, Clifford, and Anthias, Selvadurai not only seizes upon the disruptive possibilities of diasporic positions, but he also reroutes, or queers, these processes to stretch the boundaries of some of the founding premises in contemporary diaspora studies.

While the South Asian diaspora in Canada thus has a clearly-established literary presence, the broad expanse of community included under the term “South Asian” highlights the productive potential of the concept of diaspora when it is deployed to undermine essentialized national or ethnic origins. In surveying a large number of leading diaspora theorists, Anthias concludes that for too many theorists “diaspora itself relies on a conception of ethnic bonds as central . . . elements of social organisation,” and argues that “the concept of ‘diaspora’ can only act as a heuristic advance if it is able to overcome the very problems found in earlier notions of ethnicity” (576, 577). The vast number of ethnicities and nationalities liable to be represented under the “South Asian” banner renders the term almost absurd and poses an effective challenge to diaspora theorists who over-privilege “origin” or implicitly advance “pure” ethnicity as a fundamental diasporic characteristic. The provisional establishment of a South Asian diaspora, because it blurs so many ethnic and nationalist boundaries, struggles to overcome such problems. As Kanaganayakam writes in his introduction to *Configurations of Exile: South Asian Writers and Their World*, “The term ‘South Asian’ suggests a retreat from arbitrary inclusion and a

consolidation of ethnic identification, although one cannot fail to recognize the obvious subversion achieved by the multiplicity it accommodates" (xii). Beyond even the question of national or ethnic origin, this multiplicity in the Canadian literary scene embraces a wide array of literary forms and projects. Even a brief list of South Asian writers would include such accomplished names as Rienzi Crusz, Bharati Mukherjee, Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Rau Badami, and Ven Begamudré, as well as, obviously, Shyam Selvadurai. All of these writers belong to the South Asian diaspora, and all produce writing which appeals to very different cultural and aesthetic perspectives. The quantity of writers and the diversity represented by the term "South Asian" thus demands that it be used under a deliberate, provisional suspension of certain differences; the term is only meaningful in that it demands investigation of the differences which are suspended in the process of creating identity categories. Selvadurai contributes to the South Asian diaspora's many divides by introducing non-heteronormative sexuality as a potentially defining type of identification in South Asian diasporic experiences.

An overview of key diasporic texts reveals that some of the leading contributors to diaspora theory do not recognize the need to highlight power imbalances within displaced cultural groups. Most likely because theorists founding contemporary diasporic thought were intensely focused on opening up the field of diaspora studies beyond essentialized origin and race when they wrote their texts, those texts suffer from inattention to in-group inequalities stemming from class, gender, and sexual difference. In Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," for example, none of these latter issues ever surface as he works to de-essentialize race as the pivotal referent of a Black diaspora. In Clifford's "Diasporas," "gender" and "class" are mentioned, but receive sparse attention. Clifford addresses the idea

that diasporas can bear problematic class relationships to host populations, but he does not make room for class and caste hierarchies within any given diasporic group; he briefly engages the issue of gender discrimination, asking, “Do diaspora experiences reinforce or loosen gender subordination?” (259), but does not at all engage heterosexist discrimination. As Jasbir K. Puar points out in “South Asian (Trans)nation(alism)s and Queer Diasporas,” Clifford overwhelmingly “privileges a masculine, mobile, middle- or upper-class subject” (408). This type of oversight, moreover, is not particular to Hall and Clifford, but is characteristic of several dominant diaspora theorists. Anthias, for example, criticizes Robin Cohen, Paul Gilroy, and Homi Bhabha at different points in her essay for androcentric and/or class insensitive work. Paradoxically demonstrating both the type of open-mindedness needed to account for sexuality in diaspora studies and, conversely, her own blindness to the specific axis of sexuality, Anthias writes that “it may be possible to see ethnicity, gender, and class as crosscutting and mutually *reinforcing* systems of domination and subordination [in diasporas]” and that diaspora-based “intersections of ethnicity, gender, and class may construct multiple, uneven and *contradictory* social patterns” (574). Selvadurai’s texts do not offer a sustained plot-focus on the injustices inflicted and liberation available in diaspora, but the events of his texts, when we consider that they were written from a diasporic writerly position, invite a reconsideration of the utopic aura that surrounds diaspora discourse.

While key diaspora texts, then, tend to overlook the importance of investigating power imbalances within diasporas, so do many of the key texts in queer theory fail to account for the importance of the difference embodied by people dwelling-in-displacement and people of colour. In introducing their collection *Q&A: Notes on a Queer Asian America*,

David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom draw attention to this point in a way that resonates with my argument about the shortcomings of foundational diaspora theory. Eng and Hom write that

in cultures in which asymmetric race and class relations are a central and organizing principle of society, one may also become a queer in opposition to other queers. To endorse the centralization of sex and sexuality in lesbian/gay studies without serious consideration of how other axes of differences form, inform, and deform the queer subject would be to ignore the corrective theoretical insights of Third World (difference) feminism. The invariable effect would be to cast the white, European, middle-class gay man as the unacknowledged universal subject of lesbian/gay and queer studies. (12)

Though it does not restrict itself to diasporic or visible minority politics, a relatively recent approach to queer studies – queer space theory – provides a loose set of tools for dislodging the assumed white citizen by displacing critical gaze onto locations and contexts. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, the editors of *Queers In Space*, like many of the diaspora theorists discussed above, seem mildly conflicted about this key strength in the introduction to their collection. On the one hand, they explicitly draw attention to the failure of other types of queer theory to account for the experiences of non-white and non-Western homosexual men and women. For example, they argue that queer theory is “often framed in Eurocentric, particularly white North American terms that [exclude] people of color and much Third World activism” (5). On the other hand, little of this commitment to a sensitivity of place – presumably extending to people of colour outside of North America as well as within – resides in their reductive assertion that “many homophobic contexts . . . still exist in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world” (7). The gravitational pull towards the West is also implicit in their mapping of “original” queer spaces in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York and at the Stonewall Riots of 1969. While this type of implicit place-bias represents a deep conflict within queer theory

and activism which I will address in greater detail later in this chapter, the flexible perspective which the editors prescribe still throws a useful light on readings of Selvadurai's texts. Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter write, "We look at places of every size: closets, buildings, cities and regions . . . This book's essays evoke the social and biophysical textures of regional queerscapes, the shifting of often hidden locations of erotic and increasingly politicized alien(n)ations in the form of new queer networks, institutions, and locations" (8). The editors focus on analyzing tangible geographies instead of fictive representations of space, but applied to literary analysis, their approach calls attention to the way space can signify as more than just a setting for significant action.

Over and over again in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai poses challenges to a potentially heterosexist diasporic readership by confronting it with textual moments that harmonize "funny" gender and sexuality with normative diasporic longing. On the one hand, Selvadurai invites displaced readers to identify with the process of remembering the struggle to sustain identities and fulfill desires which were cause for persecution in the homeland. The inherent complication in asking for such identification, however, is that South Asian diasporic sentimentality often includes heterosexist attitudes which view homosexuality as a distasteful by-product of displacement to "the West." Rakesh Ratti stresses this opinion in his introduction to *A Lotus of Another Color*, writing "South Asian communities are often uncomfortable with our presence and try to pass off homosexuality as a trait foreign to our native lands" (13). Nayan Shah echoes this observation in "Sexuality, Identity, and the Uses of History" when he writes about the ways that South Asian diasporas often organize their communities around the values that dominated in the homeland. He writes that "The conservative ideologies of heterosexist South Asians [in South Asian countries] equate queer

sexualities with an already well-defined yet adaptable arsenal of ‘Western evils’ – divorce, drinking alcohol, eating meat, or drug abuse” (199). South Asian emigrants are under a good deal of pressure to endorse this stance, Shah adds, because, in exile from home nations, they are already “unceasingly chastised for shedding their ‘culture’ and acquiring the degenerate and destructive values of white societies” (119). Perhaps because they want to retain solidarity amongst South Asian queer men and women, Ratti and Shah do not attempt to specify the source of diasporic heteronormative cultural logic within any specific mode of diasporic home-affiliation, be it through nationalist, ethnic, or religious identifications. Nonetheless, their observations expose the menace of travelling bias, whereby structures of prejudice developed in countries of origin are used to organize diasporic communities’ social codes in the ongoing negotiation of cultural relocation.

As Ratti and Shah’s non-specificity indicates, diasporic heterosexism is produced through varied home-cultural identifications. As I illustrated extensively in my second chapter, Sri Lanka’s dominant national mentality is coded as heterosexist at the level of both official nation-state and popular national consciousness, and so a study of diasporic heterosexism draws attention to an unspoken contradiction in subversive-utopic theories of diaspora. While the diasporic position is one which exceeds the stable structure of the nation-state, it does not necessarily elude the dangers of national identities, and consequently, does not necessarily call for a reconsideration of home-based biases. Clifford overlooks this capacity for replicated in-group prejudices when he discusses diasporic nationalisms. He writes, “I do not want to suggest that diasporic cultural politics are somehow innocent of nationalist aims or chauvinist agendas. . . . [b]ut such discourses are usually weapons of the (relatively) weak” (251). His measure of diasporic weakness takes

only into consideration the power of the diaspora in relation to the nation-state, and ignores the power imbalances that diasporic elites can maintain within displaced populations.

Clifford again glosses over this aspect of diaspora when he writes that “Association with another nation, region, continent, or world-historical force (such as Islam) gives added weight to claims against an oppressive national hegemony” (255). While Clifford is correct that diasporic identifications may be a strong source of resistance to the hegemony of the nation-state, he does not mention that they also threaten to create their own web of in-group discriminations based on allegiance to national or “world-historical” associations.

Selvadurai’s fiction, however, recognizes and works to disrupt this internal hegemony: by revisiting the origins of his homosexuality through diasporic recollections of home – both in terms of nation and domestic space – the narrator seeks to rattle diasporic mentalities that configure homosexuality as a foreign corruption of the “sustained purity” maintained in displaced cultures.

In the final tableau of *Funny Boy*’s lead story, “Pigs Can’t Fly,” Selvadurai creates a diasporic-like moment of queer exile in which Arjie’s sense of displacement is experienced, simultaneously, through physical expulsion and social alienation. Before this moment, however, Selvadurai first invokes the diasporic narrative frame of origin-recollection. Early on in the story, the narrator establishes his diasporic perspective by describing his position in Canada and his retrospective narrative angle “made sentimental by the loss of all that was associated [with childhood family moments]” (5). In seeking origin, the narrator initially recreates the idyllic, stable home space of Colombo with its comprehensive extended-family network. This is a place where not only brothers, sisters, and parents are present, but where a rich, familiar community of cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents thrives. Narrating the

family's "spend-the-days" at his grandparents' house, the narrator participates in the diasporic forms of "longing" and "memory" identified by Clifford, processes which help maintain "a sense of connection [which] must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing" (247, 255). At the same time, however, Selvadurai queers this conventional nostalgia by portraying origin in a way that cannot be tidily reduced to normative national or ethnic origin. As Gayatri Gopinath observes in "Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion," "remembered instances of cross-gender identificatory practices and pleasures become a means of negotiating the loss of home as a fantasied site of geographic rootedness, belonging, and gender and erotic play" (476). While the normative diasporic narrative elements of family cohesion and Sri Lankan home space invite diasporic subjects to identify with the narrator's longing, Selvadurai queers this process by routing their diasporic identification through a pre-lapsarian gender transgression: "origin" in *Funny Boy* signifies as the joy of queered gender as much as it signifies desire for an unbroken home.

As his narrator shifts from reconstructing the idyllic origin of gender-play to reliving the process of expulsion, Selvadurai suggests a tension between a hostile, restrictive home and a frighteningly liberatory exile that parallels the diasporic tension between oppressive nation-state and transnational displacement. Anticipating the interests of queer space theory, Gopinath writes that "Arjie's eventual traumatic banishment from the world of the girls and his forced entry into proper gender identification are figured in terms of geography and spacialization" (474). To be more specific, these spaces are delineated in the cartographic language of "territories": Arjie explains how "Territorially, the area around my grandparents' house was divided into two," before describing in detail the front yard space that "belonged

to the boys” and “the second [back yard] territory [which] was called ‘the girls’ ’” (3). As I argue in my first chapter, the gender-coded spaces themselves do not contain Arjie – he relies on the feminine sanctuary of the back garden to unlock his idealized feminine self – it is the agents of authority which render him placeless. My first chapter tracks the way his suffering begins with his Kantha Aunty, who discovers and derisively exposes him, escalates with the involvement of his parents, who attempt to re-orient his gendered play by demanding that he play cricket with the other boys, and culminates with his grandmother, Ammachi, who attempts to beat him with her cane. The crescendoing series of corrective measures which Arjie must suffer parallels the various hegemonic attitudes sustained and coercive heterosexist actions undertaken by the Sri Lankan government which I detail in my previous chapters.

The narrator recalls how, rather than suffer the final stage of policing and punishment at the familial domestic property, he had escaped the home territory to travel to the space of the town beach. The reader knows from the rising action of the story that Arjie is driven to his short-lived physical exile by overlapping, unrelenting impositions of heterosexist judgement; rather than focus on the experience of gender transgression at this point, however, Arjie’s narration of his journey to the beach is communicated with language that resonates powerfully in a diasporic register.

Continued attention to the significance of space reveals how Selvadurai’s structuring of Arjie’s escape speaks simultaneously to both a global queer community and to a diasporic South Asian community. Still a child, Arjie does not, of course, cross transnational borders, but the narrator clearly establishes this moment as a transborder experience by describing Arjie “paus[ing] briefly” at the railway lines before “scrambl[ing] over the rocks to the

beach” (38). The narrator invokes the diasporic experiences of unfamiliarity and isolation as he recalls that “This daytime beach seemed foreign compared with the beach of the early evening, which was always crowded with strollers and joggers and vendors. Now both the beach and the sea, once so familiar, were like an unknown country into which I had journeyed by chance” (39). On the one hand, Selvadurai’s depiction of Arjie’s interaction with his environment seems to embrace a moment that transcends particular place. This pivotal moment in Arjie’s consciousness – when he first realizes “that something ha[s] changed” (39) – is a near-exact embodiment of Ingram’s highly-transferable vision of “queer space” as he describes it in “Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(n)ation”:

Marginality of queer desires, acts, and communalities produces alienation, and responses such as the formation of alternative social networks can produce more marginalization. . . . one process feeds off the other: an erotic marginality leads to an internalized and environmental alienation, and this constitutes the core, the queerness, the queasy antipodean of ‘queer space.’ (29)

The narrator’s handling of space, in this moment, is also inflected with the language of diasporic experience. Though Arjie, as a child, has not traveled transnationally, the diasporic language used by the narrator is used in hindsight, and thereby frames the experience of alienation in a way that appeals to a particular readership. The narrator’s employment of a diasporic structure of reference is later validated by the fact of his subsequent, literal journey to a foreign country. Consequently, this moment offers special identification to readers who have endured the shock of physical, literal diasporic isolation.

Selvadurai intensifies his diasporic framing of queer experiences by further depicting Arjie’s exile in more diasporic detail. Arjie’s contemplation of his displaced situation causes his perception of the beach to take on, alternately, utopic and dystopic characteristics, and so Selvadurai’s text concurs with Clifford’s assertion that diaspora consciousness is always a

product of interplay between positive and negative experiences (“Diasporas” 256). In the first moments following Arjie’s escape from Ammachi’s cane, Arjie’s space of exile is idealized: “The sound of the waves, their regular rhythm, ha[s] a calming effect on [him]” (38). Only moments later, however, as Arjie realizes how his internal isolation is synchronized with his physical isolation, the waves seem to become larger, “impersonal and oblivious to [his] despair” (39). Arjie begins to notice how they crash against the beach with “their crests frothing and hissing” (39). The oscillation between the comforting freedom of escape and the open hostility of foreign space is, again, a narrative which welcomes the empathic readership of a diasporic population which has undergone the liberating-but-disorienting experience of relocation.

Funny Boy continues to signify richly through simultaneous queer and diasporic channels even in the next story, “Radha Aunty,” when Arjie returns to the domestic space of his grandmother’s house. Though the return of the seven-year-old boy is inevitable on the level of plot, the way that Selvadurai crafts the ensuing situation continues to call into question the assumed heteronormative diasporic subject. Initially, “Radha Aunty” reinforces the disciplinary heterosexual image of the homeland in opposition to the liberating diaspora space by portraying Arjie’s re-entry as an occasion for coercive and hegemonic punishment. Reminiscent of the illegal police beatings and social slanders to which homosexuals are vulnerable, the narrator remembers receiving “a caning so severe that Ammachi broke the cane while administering it,” as well as being assigned “unpleasant” menial house tasks made “unbearable by Ammachi’s constant supervision . . . and the cuffs [he had] received on the side of [his] head for any mistakes” (43-44). While this initial scene may work to confirm, for heterosexist diasporic readers, the integrity of a heteronormative homeland, Arjie quickly

develops ways of coping with and provisionally transforming the prison-like space of the home into a space worthy of queered nostalgia.

Extending the opportunity for a diasporic readership to identify with a recognizable experience of displacement that is nonetheless inflected by queer experience, the narrator's description of Arjie's return to the homespace further invokes diasporic nostalgia for home, even as it further queers that nostalgia. Though closeted away from the normatively-gendered front- and backyard play-spaces by his household chores, Arjie develops new networks which enable him to indulge his transgressive, feminine play inside what now seems to be the "middle zone" of the house between the boys' and the girls' territories. Perhaps hinting at the way transpolitical solidarities can be achieved in mutually-occupied spaces of duress, Arjie's ongoing, class-coded humiliation gives Janaki, Ammachi's house-servant, reason to pity him. She provides him with a new outlet for his imagination by allowing him access to her secret collection of love comics. The narrator fondly recalls searching out a counter-closet space in "the open corridor that joined the kitchen to the main house" (44). This reprieve was his only moment of relief in the day, attainable only while Ammachi napped.

The narrator remembers discovering an even more fulfilling way to queer Ammachi's heteronormative, oppressive domestic space when he recalls building a relationship with Radha Aunty, another character displaced from the norms of Sri Lankan Tamil culture. Radha Aunty, who has been living in America for several years, quickly develops a problematic relationship with her family when she returns. The distance that has grown between her and home traditions rise to the fore as she copes with her mother's (Ammachi's) efforts to engage her in an arranged marriage. Though only the inklings of this

plot-line are in place when Radha Aunty helps to save Arjie from his physical and social isolation in the house, her distance from the normative organization of the household is immediately evident to Arjie, as is his marginalized status evident to her. Curiously stumbling upon Arjie as he reads one of Janaki's "girlish" love-comics in the open corridor, Radha Aunty invites him to her room to play. Though the room is, physically, a part of the stifling domestic territory where Arjie's gender normativity is enforced, the space becomes revolutionized as he surveys the vast array of cosmetics which Radha Aunty had brought from America: "I had been in this room before," the narrator remembers, "but now it was transformed by her personal effects. The greatest change was the dressing table, for the surface was covered with her makeup" (49). In the absence of oppressive authority and inspired by the encouragement of his amused aunt, Arjie allows Radha Aunty to beautify him with lipstick, eye shadow, and even a darkened birthmark. Gaining confidence in the protected, queered space and buoyed by the laughing approval of both Janaki and Radha Aunty, Arjie even takes advantage of the moment to delightedly paint his own nails (49-50). While these examples in "Radha Aunty" describe queered gender – not sexual – norms, Selvadurai achieves a much more dramatic queering of the domestic space in "The Best School of All." In this story, Arjie experiences his sexual coming-of-age when he loses his virginity with Shehan in the darkened space of the family garage (259-260). Queered domestic space again sends an ambivalent message as the dark privacy of the garage is quickly contrasted with a bright, crowded family lunch party and Arjie is filled, alternately, with bliss and shame. While the narrative in these moments emphasizes the exclusion of non-normative gender performances and sexual acts in "home" cultures, the narrative

process whereby “origins” are nostalgically recreated works towards diasporic inclusion on an overarching level.

Though she generates, at times, very different interpretations from my own, Gopinath’s “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora” outlines an argument that is parallel to the one that appears here. Gopinath observes, for example, that “*Funny Boy* lays claim to both the space of ‘home’ and the nation by making both the site of non-heteronormative desire and pleasure in a nostalgic diasporic imaginary” (485). Throughout her paper, however, Gopinath risks reinscribing incompatible difference within the South Asian diaspora instead of promoting diasporic solidarity. In assessing *Funny Boy*, she generates what she describes as a “‘queer diasporic’ reading,” a process which, “On the one hand . . . renders intelligible the particularities of same-sex desiring relations within spaces of homosociality and presumed heterosexuality, and, on the other hand . . . deliberately wrenches particular scenes and moments out of context and extends them farther than they would want to go” (472). Using this methodology, Gopinath’s interpretations are, at points, “more queer” than a “straight” reading would allow. For example, she interprets seven-year-old Arjie’s game of dressing-up like a bride as introducing “the potentiality of a female same-sex eroticism” that is only describable in the impossible “queer diasporic logic that allows for two brides together” (474-75, 485). Because my use of “straight” in this context refers both to the text’s likely range of possibilities – if not actual intents – and also the heteronormative perspective of a diasporic readership, Gopinath risks extending the Sri Lankan nation-state’s disavowal of queerness into the diaspora. While my arguments in chapter two agree with Gopinath’s assertion that the nation-state attempts to make expressing homosexuality extraordinarily difficult, my argument in this chapter swerves from Gopinath’s emphasis on the

impossibility of queer presence in the South Asian diaspora. For example, in analyzing Selvadurai's nostalgic approach, Gopinath writes that "home for a queer diasporic subject becomes not only that which 'we cannot not want' but also that which we cannot and could never have" (476). She also writes that "queer diasporic logic" evidences "an 'impossible' subject" (485). I contend, however, that in speaking from a queer diasporic position, Selvadurai's text not only critiques but also transforms that seeming impossibility, thereby re-presenting his place of origin as a site of hope for solidarity instead of as a site of negation. While the difference of our approaches may be only a nuance, my argument attends to what I believe is a deliberate interweaving of diaspora and queer experiences for the purpose of introducing new solidarities which recognize and include a queer presence in the South Asian "home" which becomes a constitutive element of South Asian diaspora.

Though I analyzed "Riot Journal: an Epilogue" with different critical attentions in previous chapters, a brief re-contextualization of *Funny Boy's* final story yields a final affirmation of the text's reach for unity-in-displacement. The story, composed of Arjie's hurried diary entries, describes the Chelvaratnam family as they are pushed into transnational exile by Sri Lanka's 1983 communal riots. *Funny Boy* is stripped of its nostalgic tone as Arjie documents in the present tense the murder of his grandparents and the destruction of his house by violent mobs. As he makes love to Shehan one last time before preparing for his departure, Arjie's homosexuality is not under erasure (310). Gopinath points out that "The smell of Shehan's body lingering on [Arjie's] clothes becomes 'a final memento,' not only of a remembered scene of homoerotic desire but of Sri Lanka, of 'home' itself" ("Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora" 477). While homosexual experience is thus constructed as integral to the narrator's diasporic perspective in this final section, Selvadurai, who is more concerned, at

this point in *Funny Boy*, with weaving diasporic solidarity than with asserting homosexual identity, allows Arjie's focus on his sexuality to take a secondary position as he focuses upon coping with experiences of mass violence. Without asserting a reinvigorated ethnic identity or a freshly-essentialized sense of nationalism, Selvadurai intensifies his focus on pre-diasporic loss: despite his final engagement with Shehan, Arjie's obsession with the distance his "funny" identity creates between him and his family is replaced by his concern with how he, along with his family, will be construed as "funny" in a different way when displaced to Canada. Arjie's impending culture shock, outside the scope of the text, is evidenced in a small way by his anticipation of eating scones and living the life described in the British *Famous Five* books (309, 308). These day-dreams are seriously troubled, moreover, by his apprehension at the thought of facing sudden extreme poverty: "I don't think," Arjie writes in his diary, "we ever imagined we would go abroad under these circumstances, as penniless refugees" (309). In this final section, the text's attention to Arjie's non-heteronormative struggle is overwhelmed by Arjie's focus on his pre-diasporic fear of the unknown. Arjie frequently experiences trepidation throughout *Funny Boy* when struggling to unmask the ignorances which cloud his understanding of gender and sexuality; in "Riot Journal," however, Arjie's anxiety invites identification from a diasporic readership. By offering readers a chance to identify with a common diasporic experience, Selvadurai asserts diasporic community while precluding ethnic or national hegemonic reinscriptions within the diaspora.

Though my reading of *Funny Boy* privileges the integrative, mutually informing aspects of a queer perspective and a broader South Asian diasporic perspective, Gopinath's emphasis on queerness in a diasporic frame points to other important questions about

overlaps between diasporic and queer rhetoric. For example, what happens when queer affiliations are configured in a transnational network? How does diaspora discourse inflect global rhetoric? Is there a “universal,” transnational queer diaspora, or do “conventional” diasporas organized around place and ethnicity eclipse such possibilities? While Selvadurai’s first novel, *Funny Boy*, does address some of these questions, its explicitly transnational moments slightly deprioritize sexuality within larger issues of communal violence, class anxiety, and cultural displacement. *Cinnamon Gardens* provides a more direct engagement of queer transnational issues.

As queer men and women establish connections in an increasingly transnational world, global models of community and identity encounter diaspora discourse on various grounds. As I stated earlier in this chapter, I had originally expected to simply harness the subversive possibilities of diaspora discourse to reveal Selvadurai’s strategic “solution” to the oppressive forces levied by heterosexist nation-states. Selvadurai’s texts, to the contrary, consider, but also problematize diaspora as the “answer” to oppressive nation-states. As Mark Chiang points out in “Coming Out into the Global System: Postmodern Patriarchies and Transnational Sexualities in *The Wedding Banquet*,” “To identify any opposition to the nation as inherently liberatory is to restrict questions of power and inequality within a zero-sum binary of domination and emancipation, such that any reduction in one automatically produces an increase in the other” (386). *Cinnamon Gardens* allows us to engage the dominant strands of transnational queer cultural logic asserted in North America and Europe, but ultimately requires a reorganized set of understandings for negotiating South Asian queer experience.

Many of the arguments which make universalizing queer theory unpalatable for queer members of the South Asian or other diasporas can be seen through a rigorous critique of Brian Walker's "Social Movements as Nationalisms or, On the Very Idea of a Queer Nation." I will here examine Walker's article at length not because it is a canonical text, which it is not, but because it tellingly brings together in one place a host of critical insensitivities which characterize global-sounding queer discourses in general. The goal of Walker's project, it should be noted, is not to argue explicitly for a transnational queer community, though he leads readers to this interpretation through his opposition to dominant models of the nation-state, his ongoing comparison of queer communities to ethnic diasporas, and his noting of the transportability of his arguments to describe "Canada's aboriginal peoples, or French-Canadians, or Arabs and Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel" (509). His paper is relevant in this discussion because he commits fundamental errors in developing ideas of "queer nation" and "queer diaspora" without considering how these concepts might work differently, or not at all, for physically- or culturally-displaced populations in comparison to established North American gay men and lesbians. Beyond ignoring inevitable differences which arise in different cultural experiences of homosexuality, Walker states that "there is nothing of the racial bond in the collective life that gays and lesbians share" (510). He then reinforces this point by stating that the "cultural claims of gays and lesbians are undeniable," before defining these universal gay cultural claims against "ethnic, or quasi-ethnic" claims to collective rights and solidarities (510). Homosexual men and women are offered a choice of identifying as gay or as a given ethnicity as Walker traces similarities in "Chinatown, a Jewish graveyard or synagogue, an Irish pub, gay bars and community centres" (542). In remaining oblivious to the lines of solidarity that are

established within ethnic-cultural groups because of shared discriminations or, for that matter, in a transethnic frame because of similar disempowerments, Walker's ensuing arguments commit the types of erasures of which Selvadurai's texts are critical.

Because he posits a universal model of gay collectivity, Walker's arguments encounter difficulty at a basic level when he introduces concepts of "diaspora" and "nation." On the one hand, Walker's description of diaspora is useful because it blends the basic tenants of queer space theory with diaspora discourse. He points to the significant and potentially subversive relationship which some communities share with their environments in circumstances where they are overshadowed by other, dominant communities. He writes that "Diasporas cut the connection between culture and land which produces ineluctable potentials for unfairness and conflict within the ethno-territorial model" (542). This observation parlays into one of Walker's basic weaknesses. His use of "diaspora" as a designation for any adaptable, creative community which does not have functional, essentialized ties to an occupied territory divorces the term from the idea that the diasporic condition of placelessness results from stark physical displacement from a given territory. Universalizing rhetoric such as Walker's theorizes all gay men and lesbians as belonging equally to one diasporic community. These approaches preclude the types of investigations demanded by Selvadurai's fiction, investigations into queer communities for racial discrimination and investigations into South Asian diasporas and nations for heterosexist discrimination.

Walker's over-eager appropriation of diaspora discourse in discussing universalized queer communities is also apparent in the way he uses "diaspora" and "nation" interchangeably. On the one hand, the idea of "queer diaspora" allows a writer like Gopinath

to discuss the multiple and overlapping vectors of discrimination suffered by people who are in both sexually- and culturally- minoritized positions. In an attentive engagement with the concept queer diaspora, Gopinath, in "Funny Boys and Girls," defines her line of critique of movements like Queer Nation. The principles of Queer Nation, Gopinath writes, "suggest that the power of queer activism lies in its ability to exploit the disjuncture between queers having access to the state and its juridical privileges, that is, to citizenship, and being simultaneously denied access to the nation" (120). However, she continues, "As queer South Asians in the diaspora, 'citizenship,' queer or otherwise, is not something that we can ever take for granted" (120-121). Walker, on the other hand, overlooks the politics of queer cultural difference by creating a universalized image of de-territorialized queer diaspora which directly extends from his argument for a genuine queer nationalism. Walker entirely neglects the problematic relationship which displaced homosexual men and women have with host nation-states when he immediately and wholeheartedly embraces the model of Queer Nation advanced by Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman's "Queer Nationality" in his first paragraph. Complementing Berlant and Freeman's agitative-activist rhetoric, Walker creates an argument for a recognition of legitimate queer nationalism built around a stable sense of gay and lesbian "peoplehood" which then becomes the core of his projected queer diaspora.

Experiences which Walker identifies as constitutive of queer "peoplehood" have potential cross-cultural currency which resonate, to a degree, with Selvadurai's texts. On an abstract level, Walker's description of key experiences is inclusive of people of colour and people in diasporic positions. He identifies "a clarification of local experiences of stigma and harassment" as "The trigger for the sense of a distinctive gay and lesbian peoplehood" (522).

Both *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, as I detail extensively throughout my first chapter, certainly work to bring such specific place-based experiences to the fore. Beyond testifying to the otherwise unspoken-of “local experiences of violence and harassment,” moreover, Selvadurai’s fiction also provides guiding examples on how to cope with such experiences, a process which Walker identifies as another fundamental site of gay and lesbian identification (523). He describes how “coming out narratives show gay people how to call on the latent sources of tolerance in those that they encounter” (523). Without reiterating the work of previous chapters, I will assert that Selvadurai fulfills this function to the point of it being a driving force in his texts.

At the same time that arguments like Walter’s present an inclusive face, the nuances in the presentation of these arguments can reinscribe the type of dominant universal Western queer subject which Selvadurai’s fiction displaces. For example, when Walker emphasizes the primacy of “gay people . . . link[ing] up their local experiences of violence and harassment with the experiences of other gay men and lesbians,” he reveals his mainstream-American bias by repeatedly locating this trend firmly in the 1950’s and 1960’s (523). Because this phenomenon has only started to arise in a focused way in South Asian countries and South Asian diasporas in recent years, Walker’s chronology threatens to frame them as relatively undeveloped. Also, although he refers to the value of “coming out narratives,” he presumes a very culturally-specific type of “coming out” when he writes that “The literature on ‘coming out’ . . . shows gay people how best to deal with the dangerous moment when they inform those around them of the nature of their inclinations” (526). The cultural biases which underlie arguments like Walker’s – for example that “coming out” is an inevitable, singular moment when all is revealed – are deeply problematic. The universalizing

standards in Walker's paper fail to address both the different expressions of sexuality which occur in non-Western places and the cross-cultural expressions of sexuality which may arise in diasporic communities within North America and Europe.

My attention to the two interrelated problems in "global" gay identities which I identify here – that of a universalized Euro-American path of "development" and an assumed definitive space of "the closet" – is indebted to the work of Martin Manalansan IV's "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma." Manalansan also seeks to disrupt the mis-steps taken in the name of global rhetoric and universalized Euro-American gay and lesbian identities. He begins his project by contextualizing the term "gay" in the decades following the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Though I have gestured to the universalizing effect which Walker creates by imposing narratives of development on the level of large-scale social movements, Manalansan points to the way universalizing narratives of development can also colonize on the individual level: he points out that although its implications often pass unexamined, the term "*gay* gains meaning according to a developmental narrative that begins with an unliberated, 'prepolitical' homosexual practice and that culminates in a liberated, 'out,' politicized, 'modern,' 'gay' subjectivity" (487). In an effort to disrupt the imperializing effect of this linguistic subtext, Manalansan introduces the transplanted Filipino American diasporic logic of the *bakla* and explains how it confounds globalized Euro-American teleologies by refusing the conventional terms of "development" and "coming out." *Bakla*, Manalansan explains, is a Filipino category "for particular types of men who engage in practices that encompass effeminacy, transvesticism, and homosexuality" (491). Manalansan's discussion of the *bakla* illustrates that while categories of sexualized identity are far from irrelevant in Filipino

culture, they are not deployed or responded to in accordance with “global” American categories. Citing one difference between these models, Manalansan writes that “Filipino gay men argue that identities are not just proclaimed verbally but are [more predominantly] ‘felt’ . . . or intuited” (499); the identities resulting from the insertion of the *bakla* into American spaces, Manalansan writes, “go against the simplistic movement from the private domain to the public realm implied by the ideas of the closet” (499). Whereas activists and theorists such as Walker thus appropriate “diaspora” as a term for defining universalized gay experiences such as those centred on “the closet,” critics such as Manalansan consider queer sexualities within cultural diasporas for the purpose of derailing such universalizations.

Though I have focused more on the South Asian solidarity created rather than the global identity disputed in my reading of *Funny Boy*, my arguments about Selvadurai’s first novel lead directly into my reading of *Cinnamon Gardens*. For example, one of the points in which I located the potential for diasporic solidarity was in the unnerving-but-liberatory experience of exile in relation to restrictive authority. While I maintain that Selvadurai’s text deliberately creates this tension, any over-reliance on this dynamic in interpreting such moments threatens to reinscribe one of the fundamental universalizing assumptions in Euro-American global understandings of gay identity: that the “‘gay’ subject [has] to leave a ‘third world’ site of gender and sexual oppression to ‘come out’ into the more liberated West” (Gopinath “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora” 477,479). Just as Selvadurai complicates this paradigm in *Funny Boy*, he sharpens his criticism of it in *Cinnamon Gardens* by portraying transnational negotiations of place and homosexuality in the relationship between Balendran, from Sri Lanka, and Richard, from England.

Selvadurai lays the foundation for a critical awareness of culturally-insensitive models of queer universality in *Cinnamon Gardens* by initially sketching out tensions between a stifling, hostile home in “the East” and a utopic, escapist diaspora in “the West.” Ironically inverting the usual understanding of the phrase “diasporic longing,” *Cinnamon Gardens*’ narrator portrays Balendran as a character located in Sri Lanka as he reminisces about his long-abandoned position of cultural displacement in England. As he stands in the confining space of his father’s office – made confining by both the “gloomy and musty” qualities of the room itself and his father’s overwhelming presence – Balendran’s yearning memory begins to reconstruct a portrait of his student days in England (28). The act of memory is triggered by his father’s request that Balendran reconnect with his former lover, Richard, who is visiting from England. Because, as Balendran knows, the motive for the request is explicitly political and has been made in spite of their former relationship, it represents a distinct closeting-in of Balendran’s already suppressed homosexuality. Though Balendran decides he can suppress his homosexuality and agrees to his father’s request, his memory reacts with visions characterized by a relative spatial and social openness which convey Balendran’s nostalgia for the sexual freedom which he managed to attain. These moments resonate with moments in *Funny Boy* when Arjie fantasizes about the commercial freedom that he expects will be available in Canada. Ironically, Arjie anticipates wrongly: looking forward to Canada, he actually dreams about British novels and foods which will not be available to him in Canada. Balendran’s idealization is slightly different: it is articulated through recollection instead of anticipation, and it directly addresses sexual politics. Nonetheless, his memory also appeals to an ultimately- disappointed and unrealistic perception of Western freedom. Before detailing the specificities of diasporic

disappointment, however, Selvadurai provides a thorough portrayal of Balendran's idealization of European tolerance towards sexuality. For example, after leaving his father's office, Balendran recalls the many nights he spent drinking and singing with Richard in an English pub. Focalizing on Balendran's memory, the narrator describes how, "As the evening progressed and their inhibitions fell away, Richard's hand would invariably slip under Balendran's shirt. He would gently run his fingers up and down Balendran's spine until Balendran had to lean against the back of the piano to hide his arousal" (36). The excitement which Balendran experienced in this moment was partly derived from the shared secrecy of his and Richard's exchange; same-sex sexual activity was, at this point in history, still forbidden by England's penal code. Compared to Balendran's experiences in Ceylon, however, the fact that barely-concealed acts of intimacy could be carried out in the setting of a pub with only minimal disguise makes him long for England's freedom. The narrator's sensuous description of Balendran's open desire is eroticized precisely because it took place in a public sphere.

Beyond emphasizing Balendran's longing for the relative freedom of public sexual desire permitted in "the West," the narrator also arranges a tension between Sri Lanka and English domestic scenes as Balendran longs for England as a place where a homosexual relationship can be one aspect of a broader, socially respectable life. As I argue in chapter one, Balendran's domestic life in Sri Lanka consists largely of a cluster of heteronormative scripts which are constantly haunted by his internalized heterosexist self-apprehension. Balendran's social situation is reflected in his domestic space. The false intimacy which darkens Balendran and Sonia's relationship is reflected in Sonia's experience of their home space. Neglected by Balendran at night, she perceives her room as "cavernous and

forbidding” and perceives her mosquito-net covered, four-poster bed to be like “a funeral bier” (77, 78). In contrast to their house’s foreboding qualities, the narrator’s description of Balendran’s bright England offers a utopic domestic scene. Following his conversation with his father, Balendran is still coping with the idea of Richard coming to Sri Lanka when he stumbles upon a book given to him by Richard while they were in England, a significant book because it had explained to Balendran for the first time “that inversion had already been studied by scientific men who did not view it as pathological” (58). Balendran recalls seeking out the author, Edward Carpenter at the countryside house where he lived with his lover. Once again ironically reversing the conventional direction of diasporic longing for home, the narrator describes Balendran remembering

What a glorious summer day it had been, warm, but not enough to make walking uncomfortable, rolling fields on either side that sloped down to the road, the light green of the grass contrasting sharply with the dark colours of trees that bordered the fields and clustered here and there in small copses. Then there had been Carpenter’s house, nestled among foliage, a charming brook running at the foot of his property. (59)

The pastoral tableau represented by Carpenter’s house encapsulates, for Balendran, the possibilities open to homosexual men in “the West.” While he acknowledges the “societal censure” which he thinks must have challenged Carpenter and his lover’s way of living, Balendran is also persuaded of the men’s success at their “comradely” life by their friendship with Arunachalam, the famous first president of Ceylon’s National Congress (58-59). Balendran’s memories of his student days in England thus construct a wide range of experiences which constitute Europe as a utopic place for homosexual men: not only can expressions of sexual desire be articulated in public, but even mature homosexual

relationships can enjoy the privilege of being “out” in a relatively secure domestic arrangement.

While the narrator thus creates a sense of the liberty available in England’s open spaces by setting them against the oppressive quality of Sri Lanka’s tight closets, he gradually upsets the stability of this paradigm. As in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai invites South Asian diasporic identification by countering memories of liberty with memories of the harsh racism deployed against people of colour in “the West,” no matter what their sexual orientation. Just after he mentally revisits the utopic glen of Carpenter’s house, Balendran reflects on his own circumstances in Colombo, and realizes how different his own study is from his father’s confining space. Selvadurai clearly points out that not all of Sri Lanka is a closet as the narrator describes Balendran’s office as “light and airy, with lace curtains that constantly moved in the sea breeze” (59). This observation not only complicates one-dimensional vilifications of “the East,” but it also leads to complications of any uncritical celebrations of “the West.” As Balendran enjoys the small relief of his private study, he also realizes how, as a person of colour, he would not have had access to the same advantages – sexual or economic – enjoyed by Carpenter in England. He thinks back to the apartment he had shared with Richard, and remembers how “There had been a shabbily dressed Indian gentleman who had lived in the same crescent as them. He had seemed ancient then, but he was probably close to Balendran’s present age. He had a constantly apologetic manner about him, an excessive deference, the way he would unnecessarily step off the pavement to let others pass” (60). Seeing the toll of a racist Western culture upon this man, Balendran expects that “He would have never amounted to anything but a junior partner in some barrister’s firm” and that “The only flat he could have afforded would have been similar to

the one he had as a student with its unbearably cold hall and toilet” (60). Balendran’s cynical analysis of his chances in England is not presented as objective – he is still seeking to rationalize his own weak response to the circumstances which destroyed his relationship with Richard – yet the issues which he raises severely undermine his own over-idealization of English liberty.

Ensuing scenes in *Cinnamon Gardens* continue to queer the paradigm of liberal-West / oppressive-East that characterizes global gay rhetoric by undermining the ubiquity of coming-out narratives and by mapping queer spaces which reconfigure the binary logic of the closet. Although my interest in the signifying potential of queer spaces is, as I indicated earlier in this chapter, largely indebted to the work of Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter in *Queer Spaces*, these writers occasionally risk projecting ideas which limit explorations of differently- cultured constructions of queerness. For example, in the conclusion to their collection, “Strategies for (Re)Constructing Queer Communities,” Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter provide a brief lexicon of various queer spaces. Though their work shares in some of the same goals as Selvadurai’s texts in seeking to disrupt heterosexist monopolies on space, their definitions, ranging from “queer site” to “queer space” and eventually “queerscape,” come close to constituting a developmental hierarchy in which small spaces are the tentative first steps toward the increased visibility and stability of bigger spaces. While this move broadens the scope and asserts the legitimacy of their study by offering a vocabulary for specifying differences, it also threatens to inscribe a teleology of cultural development which may undercut diasporic constructions of queer community. Their lexicon offers validation to “queer sites” – “point[s] in physical space where there is contact and exchange involving at least two people and where there is a

positive or impartial relationship to homoeroticism within a broader environment that includes some kind of homophobia” – but it also implicitly sites them as the least developed stage in the range of spaces (447). A “queer space” is made up of “An expanding set of queer sites,” a “queer node” is a “set of particularly important . . . queer sites,” and a “queerscape” is a “physical landscape that harbours queer sites and queer space” (449). While this series of specifications has strong functional value for working with certain places, it still tends to minimize the possibilities made available in places which, because of a lack of a large population or because of a different cultural aesthetic, are not necessarily moving along such a swelling, increasingly-revelatory path.

In contrast to Balendran’s early idealizations of European public spaces which enable “out” behaviour, the narrator presents a series of complex South Asian spaces which enable sexual activity while complicating the terms of the closet. Specifically, Selvadurai resurrects the ambivalent railway and beach settings which mark self-exploration in *Funny Boy* to call attention to Sri Lankan queer spaces which defy a stark division between notions of “public” and “private” and which contest the Amer-Eurocentric emphasis on visibility in celebrating gay pleasure. Aside from his use of technological language to enable a contemporary reconfiguration of the closet, Chiang makes a similar argument when he describes the diasporic position of a character in *The Wedding Banquet*: “the parameters of the closet are redrawn in the noneuclidian geometries of cyberspace,” thereby “making it increasingly difficult to speak of being in or out, since [the protagonist] is simultaneously both inside and outside in some new and complex relation of public and private” (385-86). Balendran enjoys a comparable ambiguity as he sustains a consistent but semi-anonymous sexual relationship in the reworked semi-private, semi-public zones of Colombo’s railway station and beach.

The pressures which govern the logic of these queer spaces are, on a fictive level, the pressures of 1920's Ceylon. Nonetheless, these pressures evoke those stresses frequently felt by contemporary South Asian diasporic homosexual men and lesbians who must seek out, for reasons of racial discrimination or familial pressure, alternative social networks. *Cinnamon Gardens* testifies to these reconfigured spaces in describing Balendran's Sri Lankan experiences: though Colombo's Bambalapitiya station is "long closed for the night" when Balendran visits it, the platform is "busy with men, cigarette butts glowing red in the dark" (81). The public quality of the station is, on the one hand, diminished by the darkness, but is reasserted in the men's gathering. Embracing a similar paradox, Balendran is not interested in knowing the family name of the man whom he meets, but he displays loyalty to Ranjan by consistently seeking him out for sexual engagements on the beach. The two find privacy among the rocks, but their encounter is not hurried or anxious as "Balendran like[s] to take his time with Ranjan, to prolong his bliss" under the open night sky (82). As I point out at length in earlier chapters, Selvadurai does not glorify Balendran's Sri Lankan experiences with Ranjan or assert them as superior to Balendran's English experiences with Richard. Balendran is even filled with guilt and "visited by a terrible anguish" after meeting with Ranjan, realizing that he has yet again risked destroying "his marriage [and] his family name" (83). Nonetheless, Selvadurai's diasporic insight allows him to depict the sexual community enjoyed at the station and beach in a way that testifies to the reality of "the public niche" and in a way that problematizes assumptions of the closet as an isolated space to be evacuated.

Selvadurai further disrupts the assumed superiority of "out" social systems over negotiated systems of queered compromise in his representation of Richard and Alli's displaced status. Richard and Alli, two English characters, are not in disenfranchised exile as

they travel to visit Ceylon, but by reversing the East-to-West trajectory of displacement that characterizes South Asian diasporas, Selvadurai places these characters in a position where their Western cultural norms render them ill-fit for normative society. The men overperform their sexual identities by Sri Lankan standards, causing Balendran's wife to comment on their expressiveness. Moreover, Balendran's shock that Sonia is so well-able to discuss her opinion that Alli is "a little 'outré'" reminds readers that acceptable expressions of sexual identity in Euro-American cultures may not read as legitimate in other cultures (111). Portraying this in his fiction, Selvadurai makes space for diasporic sexual identities which are stifled in Euro-American settings. As Manalansan writes after interviewing several gay members of the Filipino diaspora, "the closet is not a monolithic space, and . . . 'coming out' or becoming publicly visible is not a uniform process that can be generalized across different national cultures" (501). The sense of displacement which characterizes Richard and Alli's visit also allows Richard to perceive, from a distance, the drawbacks of the relatively-open sexual culture of England. As Richard replicates Balendran's nostalgia for a stable, monogamous homosexual relationship, the narrator shows that, despite Balendran's displacement of this desire through longing for English places, such relationships are not ensured by established subcultures. Richard laments the lack of stable monogamy which characterizes his home's homosexual culture as he reflects on his own distance from the lives of Alli and "their set" (113). While Balendran has already undercut his own blissful vision of England with his memories of racial discrimination, Richard further undercuts any paradisaic vision of England by longing for that which he cannot attain without Balendran, regardless of place.

Having thus countered Balendran's portrayal of England as an idyllic haven with the revelation of Richard's perceptions, the narrator further upsets West-East sexual hierarchies

by setting Balendran and Richard's sexual and emotional reunion in queered domestic spaces in Ceylon. For instance, although the Galle Face Hotel could easily lend itself to such purposes, Selvadurai does not set Balendran and Richard's reunification in the elite, quasi-European space of Richard's room there. Instead, Selvadurai sets the stages of their reunification in places which emphasize the practical attractiveness of the queered niches available in Sri Lanka, places which undermine the integrity of sexual-identity categories which rely on borders distinctly separating "public" and "private." Balendran and Richard first make romantic contact, for example, on their way to Balendran's family's rubber estate, an institution which is the source of both wealth and family pride. Taking a rest from their journey, they stop off at a seaside Dutch colonial fort. The narrator indicates that the original significance of the abandoned space, as an assertion of colonial power, has already been put to alternative use by Balendran's family who "had often come to this very spot for picnics and sea baths" (186). As Balendran and Richard venture into the underground guardrooms which the male members of the family had always used for changing into swimming clothes, the site becomes further queered as a place of tentative romantic encounter. The men see each other's naked bodies as they change, and the previously-colonial, previously-familial room begins to signify with the ambivalence of Colombo's railway station and nighttime beach: the narrator describes the close, dark area even as he conveys a sense of the room's vulnerability to public access. He describes the evident traces of public use, observing that "There was a fair amount of litter on the ground, but not the obligatory smell of urine that one encountered in any abandoned edifice in Ceylon" (186). Though both men are absorbed by the intimacy of the moment, initially only Richard experiences the feelings on a sexual level. By the time the men reach the family estate, however, Balendran realizes how precious

is Richard's fleeting presence in Ceylon. In the wake of this realization, Balendran's sexual feelings, too, resurface, and the men spend the night sharing their rediscovered love in the intimacy of the family's bungalow. Though this space does not convey any of the comfortable frankness which characterized Balendran's vision of the English cottage, the estate house enables a level of sexual activity which exceeds the norms of early-twentieth-century South Asian cultures and which is sufficient for Balendran and Richard's moment.

Balendran initially sees his life with his family as an obstacle which forces him to choose between them and Richard, but as he breaks the constraints of the closet paradigm he is able to reconsider his family role. As he searches for validation in his heteronormative identity following their affair, Balendran callously dismisses Richard from his life. Later, however, after coming to terms with his heteronormative anxiety through an unprecedented argument with his father, Balendran develops a new understanding of himself in relation to his family. Following the fight, Balendran is not exactly "out" by Western standards: as I point out in my first chapter, Balendran does not assign a specific name to his sexual orientation. Given that Balendran's sexual orientation is not a secret from his father and that Balendran asserts the right to not be named by a sexual category, the confrontation between him and his father is more important for the defiance which it conveys than the information which it "reveals." Consequently, the new perception of himself which Balendran develops in relation to his wife and other family members is not contingent upon any external revelation. Because he has confronted the confining pressures which made him feel closeted, Balendran comes to understand himself in a way that transcends his previous obsession with sexual identities. Whereas he once perceived his family as the body which both necessitated and constituted the closet – "they [had been] the things he had drawn around himself,

entangled his soul in, weighed his desires down with” – his rejection of “closet logic” and his acceptance of private difference allows him to re-envision their relationship (386). Observing them as they gather together, he thinks “Now they stood apart from him and they had, as a result of this detachment, become strangely sweeter” (386). Though the narrator’s words do not mention diaspora on the level of plot, Selvadurai’s text speaks with a sensitivity to the South Asian diasporic reliance on the family unit. Though his critical interest focuses on representations of East Asians, Richard Fung briefly gestures to such dependence when he writes, “As is the case for many other people of color and especially immigrants, our families and our ethnic communities are a rare source of affirmation in a racist society” (“Looking for My Penis: the Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn” 118). As in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai once again avoids essentializing ethnic or nationalist identifications within his diasporic writerly position. Instead, Selvadurai uses the perspective granted by this position to evoke longing for family cohesion and support in contrast to the assumptions of Western sexual politics.

My analyses of *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens* in this chapter have, thus, had overlapping but slightly different emphases: my reading of *Funny Boy* focused on Selvadurai’s efforts to position homosexual men and lesbians firmly in the South Asian diaspora by showing how non-normative genders and sexualities can be an integral aspect of diasporic longing. While this project is also ongoing in Selvadurai’s second novel, my aim in analyzing *Cinnamon Gardens* was to explore the premise upon which my first argument was built. In *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai shows that South Asian experiences of non-normative sexualities are, like other South Asian aspects of life in diaspora, threatened with erasure by the norms of Western countries. South Asian diasporic identities and identifications can be

overrun by the work of mainstream gay and lesbian activists and theorists who, in seeking to establish transnational solidarities or in aiming to assert their own rights in North American and European nation-states, inadvertently overwrite cultural differences. Embodying the spirit of Clifford's diasporic ideal, then, Selvadurai's texts participate in the "political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement" (Clifford 252). Sharing insight presumably gleaned from negotiations of multiple, sometimes colliding, cultural identifications, Selvadurai's texts offer critiques of various mainstream North American and diasporic South Asian cultural prejudices, but complement these critiques with visions of new solidarities.

CONCLUSION

In the end, it has turned out that the casual questions which I might have put to Shyam Selvadurai, had I been able to attend his reading at St. Jerome's, have fuelled a much larger enterprise than I would ever have discovered over dinner. At the same time, however, after scrutinizing his first two novels over the duration of this project, I am now convinced that even if I had met Selvadurai on that day my questions would not have been so easily answered. Hopefully, the numerous overlaps between my three chapters have succeeded in conveying, among many other things, that one of the greatest strengths of Selvadurai's writing is its ability to raise questions which cannot be satisfied with simple answers.

Though my thesis now comes to a close, I must admit that not all of the questions raised by Selvadurai's texts have been answered in this forum. To raise but one example, my work has focused almost entirely on Selvadurai's representations of male characters. Such a focus makes sense in this project, as male same-sex relationships are the only overtly homosexual relationships portrayed in either of Selvadurai's texts, yet female characters in Selvadurai's fiction also often find themselves in positions which challenge South Asian familial norms. Arjie's mother, for instance, struggles with the terms of conventional marriage when faced with the pressures of her husband's transnational business, and Arjie's cricket-playing cousin Meena is no less of a gender-transgressor than Arjie himself. While the challenges which Selvadurai's fiction poses to patriarchal ideals overlap with the challenges it poses to heterosexist systems of knowledge, questions that could be raised in feminist inquiry cannot be fully expressed in analysis focusing on queer experience.

In the process of interpreting and sometimes re-interpreting certain scenes in *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, I have certainly been able to follow up on some of my original curiosities even as I have come to the knowledge that any “answers” offered by Selvadurai’s texts are much more layered than they initially appear. Though I do not introduce discussion of Selvadurai’s Canadian writerly position until chapter three, my first and second chapters can be read as contributing mounting evidence for considering Selvadurai’s work in this light. My first chapter, for example, though it neglects to engage broader cultural contexts, offers a narrow focus on the dynamics of the characters’ family situations which is actually in harmony with my third chapter’s exploration of how family and community are central aspects of the South Asian diasporic cultural perspectives. This assertion of the importance of South Asian communities in chapter three, moreover, might have risked being complicitous in potentially dangerous diasporic nationalist identifications had I not illustrated the extent to which Selvadurai’s texts challenge essentialized ethnic-nationalist identifications in my second chapter. My positing of ethnic community as a source of positive solidarity for otherwise isolated homosexual men and lesbians can only be done in good conscience with the knowledge that I have already attended to the ways that Selvadurai has undermined essentialist ethnic-nationalisms. Ultimately asserting Selvadurai’s diasporic “Canadian-ness” may seem a redundant move given the acclaim he has received in the popular media. The most obvious example of such acclaim might be the SmithBooks / Books in Canada First Novel Award he received for *Funny Boy* and a perhaps-lesser-known example might be the nomination of *Cinnamon Gardens* for inclusion in the CBC’s “Canada Reads 2003” program, a program which has so far featured only a short, distinguished list of five authors including Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje (“Canada Reads”).

Nonetheless, academic criticism which has been published in various countries, including Sri Lanka, Spain, and even Canada, has downplayed Selvadurai's Canadian location, describing him in terms which echo S. W. Perera's off-hand characterization of Selvadurai as among those "Sri Lankans/Ceylonese living overseas" (87). While some articles offer slightly better contextualization, others offer worse, presenting arguments which detail Selvadurai's engagement of Sri Lanka without mentioning any international context at all. While individual sections of my work do not emphasize Selvadurai's Canadian context, my argument, as its subsections overlap to address the complex questions raised by his texts, finds overarching significance in the queerness afforded by his Canadian diasporic position.

In asserting the value of Selvadurai's Canadian-ness, however, I do not wish to undermine the tangible impact which Selvadurai's fiction has had in Sri Lanka. My act of firmly locating him in Canada must not be construed as an attempt to sever or ignore the vital connection between his writing and his place-of-origin, a move which Rey Chow warns against in "Against the Lures of Diaspora." It is precisely Selvadurai's extensive, simultaneous engagement of sexuality and displacement which makes his work unique. Chow focuses neither on South Asians nor on writers of fiction, but her work raises relevant points of inquiry as she explores the positions of diasporic "Chinese women intellectuals" in America who take up "minority" struggles and how these positions relate to Chinese women labourers in China who carry on lives characterized by disenfranchisement and suffering. Chow criticizes diasporic speakers who frame themselves in terms of identification with women in China yet allow a vast gap to develop between themselves and the actual women who continue to live in China. She argues that where such distances exist, "intellectuals are rewarded for their work in the West, [but] voices of the oppressed continue to be unheard

and intellectual work continues to be persecuted in China” (109). She continues on to observe, “There is very little we can do overseas to change the political situation ‘back there’” (109). I introduce Chow’s argument here because, while the particular politics which Chow describes rest far outside the range of my arguments in this thesis, Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri addresses comparable concerns in “‘Sri Lankan’ Canadian Poets: the Bourgeoisie That Fled the Revolution.” Sugunasiri – who works to dismiss Arun Mukherjee’s lionization of some Sri Lankan writers while harshly criticizing others for their supposedly uninformed representations of Sri Lanka – examines the ways that Canadian writers such as Michael Ondaatje, Asoka Weerasingha, and Krisanta Sri Bhagiyadatta deal with the distance between their writing and their country-of-origin, Sri Lanka. Though Sugunasiri does not discuss Selvadurai’s texts, her essay illustrates that concerns parallel to Chow’s criticisms have particular relevance in the specific area of Sri Lankan Canadian writing.

The strong South Asian Canadian writing community described in my introduction and third chapter have provided Selvadurai with a place from which he can write about sensitive politics with tremendous impact. Unlike the intellectuals described by Chow, Selvadurai’s writing has had, and continues to have, a uniquely powerful influence in Sri Lanka. The diasporic distance identified by Chow, the gap which creates a comfortable “here” and an abandoned “back there,” is utterly absent in the relationship of Selvadurai’s texts to his country-of-origin. While cultural impact need not necessarily be a primary standard against which literature is measured, the relevance of Selvadurai’s writing to Sri Lankan sexual politics has been so strong that it cannot be ignored. As Selvadurai humbly describes in an interview with Afdhel Aziz, “*Funny Boy* . . . provided a forum for talking around a dining room table, letting [everyday people] discuss something people never

discussed before except in a very salacious way” (“Shyam Selvadurai: Funny Man”). The members of Companions on a Journey, Sri Lanka’s first homosexual-rights organization, are much less modest in their appraisals of Selvadurai’s texts. Sherman de Rose, the founder of Companions on a Journey, capitalized on the momentum achieved by *Funny Boy* to organize the first meetings of the group, the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. Sagara Palihawadane, a Companions on a Journey Communications Co-ordinator, explains in a personal email that the positive articles about Selvadurai’s first book were the first articles that he, at age 23, had ever seen about “an openly gay Sri Lankan and about gays in Sri Lanka in general.” The impact of *Funny Boy* and the conversation which it opened, Palihawadane explains, operated on a communal level: “the interest *Funny Boy* generated amongst gay men and lesbians in Colombo was the first real step towards gay/lesbian organising in the country,” he writes. Sparked by Selvadurai’s writing, Companions on a Journey has grown to accommodate, astoundingly, approximately 1600 members since its inception in 1995, and has provided counseling and HIV/AIDS support to over 4500 people in Sri Lanka. While Selvadurai, publishing his writing initially in a diasporic location, may not have been physically alongside de Rose when Sri Lanka’s first homosexual solidarities were being sought, the shattering of silence achieved by his works is without compare.

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