

*Postcolonial Memory,
Queer Nationality, and
Modernity in Shyam Sel-
vadurai's Funny Boy*

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Introduction

Those spend-the-days, the remembered innocence of childhood, are now colored in the hues of twilight sky. It is a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them. By all of us having to leave Sri Lanka a year later because of communal violence and forge a new home for ourselves in Canada. (Sevadurai 1994, 5)

In Minoli Salgado's study of political resistance and Sri Lankan literature in English, she claims that the major

problem confronting the critic of Sri Lankan literature is “the problem of negotiating the relationship between historical events, historiography and literary fiction” (Salgado 2007, 5). Sri Lankan literature, she continues, “is increasingly read in terms of its relationship to the country’s ethnic conflict and the ability to narrate history as it is being made” (Salgado 2007, 5). In Shyam Selvadurai’s 1994 novel *Funny Boy*, nostalgia and memory constitute an attempt to understand the violence of cultural-national severance while at the same time telling the story of a Tamilian boy named Arjie, his sexuality, and family conflicts. *Funny Boy* is framed in the throes of the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009). It is narrated in a reflective first-person past tense that weaves a postcolonial past with the novel’s present. *Funny Boy*’s setting makes it difficult to excise the novel’s relationship to history, that is, the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 from Arjie’s coming-of-age story. Reading *Funny Boy* in terms of its representation of postcolonial memory allows us to merge Arjie’s individual memory of his childhood and the broader racial/communal memory of the Sri Lankan nation state.

In this paper, I argue that *Funny Boy* presents two important modes of postcolonial memory: First there is the nostalgic mode, a way of longing for a fleeting colonial past which haunts the cultural consciousness of colonial sympathizers in the novel. Second, there is the traumatic retrospective mode. Arjie’s postcolonial memory demonstrates a compelling rendition of cultural trauma induced

by pernicious ethnic and civil conflicts and an overpowering cultural homophobia. The two modes of postcolonial memory merge Arjie's individual coming-of-age story with the civil, ethnic, and social conflicts that culminate in one of Sri Lanka's most politically vexed years. The individual restraint and violence inflicted on Arjie's sexuality parallels the restraint and violence of Sri Lankan nationalism. The oppositional force that generates this restraint and violence in the novel is the irreconcilability of the past and present, the normative and non-normative, and, ultimately, the modern and non-modern.

Colonial Nostalgia

In *Funny Boy*, colonial nostalgia is the longing for an elusive colonial past attached to Western forms of history and knowledge. We see this nostalgic mode in Arjie's memory of Queen Victoria Academy, a school whose namesake, Queen Victoria, denotes Britain's long imperial rule over Sri Lanka (Ceylon) between 1815 and 1948. In the chapter "The Best School of 'Them All,'" Arjie remembers having to memorize two poems for Principal Black Tie, one was "Vitae Lampada," and the other, the eponymous title of chapter "The Best School of 'Them All.'" Both poems remember an idealized colonial past. Arjie articulates a dissonance between the poems' idealization of colonial customs and the customs that he sees in Queen Victoria Academy. For example, "Vitae Lampada" is about the game of

cricket, “but not cricket the way I understood it. [The poem] said that through playing cricket one learned to be honest and brave and patriotic. This was not true at the Victoria Academy” (Selvadurai 1994, 227). “*Vitae Lampada’s*” moralization of cricket does not coincide with what cricket actually means to Arjie and his peers at the Victoria Academy: “Cricket, here, consisted of trying to make it on the first-eleven team by any means, often by cheating or by fawning over the cricket master. Cricket was anything but honest” (Selvadurai 1994, 227). Arjie’s distinction between what cricket means “here,” as opposed to what it means there, that is in England and Australia, reframes the colonial tone of the poem and highlights “*Vitae Lampada’s*” coercive cultural message on colonial subjects. Arjie’s reading of the poem is critical of the school’s neocolonial mindset. For Arjie, cricket is metonym for Anglo-imperial power, which “is anything but honest” (Selvadurai 1994, 227). The dissonance between what “*Vitae Lampada*” was meant to recall (honesty, bravery, and patriotism) and what the poem actually recalls (cheating and dishonesty) presents a disconnect between a Sri Lankan colonial past and the country’s still unfolding neocolonial present.

The second poem, “The Best School of All,” is another nostalgic rendition of a cultural ethos that is no longer relevant but cherished by some of the school’s authorities. In “The Best School of All,” “the poet looked back on his school days as the best days of his life. I found it puzzling that one would be nostalgic for

something one had long to escape” (Selvadurai 1994, 226-227). Like in the case of “*Vitae Lampada*,” Arjie’s reading of “The Best School of Them All” calls into question the idealization of a colonial and Eurocentric past. Arjie’s own experience at Queen Victoria Academy was not like the speakers’ in these poems. Riddled with a residual colonial history and pride, Queen Victoria Academy is a repressive postcolonial space that muffles Arjie’s queer identity. In a sense, Queen Victoria Academy wages epistemic violence on Arjie and those like him, who do not share a sense of belonging towards a colonial past. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the “Clearest available example . . . of epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of the Other in its precarious Subjectivity” (Spivak 1988, 280-81). Queen Victoria Academy’s nostalgic postcolonial memory of imperial customs and power constitute a colonial past that interpellates Arjie as Other. Queen Victoria Academy disseminates signs of a colonial past with “*Vitae Lampada*” and “The Best School of Them All.” Such signs are the erasure of Arjie’s precarious subjectivity and the subjectivity of a society at the margins of a colonial power.

Traumatic Restrospective Retellings

Arjie recalls restraint and repression as heteronormative structures that kept him othered, queered, and “funny.”

This is made clear in the novel's first chapter "Pigs Can't Fly," where Arjie is interpellated as a "funny boy." In reference to this chapter, Gayatri Gopinath claims, "the first story in *Funny Boy*, lays out the complex system of prohibition, punishment, and compulsion that governs and structures gender differentiation" (Gopinath 2005, 170). After Arjie is discovered playing "bride-bride" with his girl cousins, one of the adults tells Arjie's father "you have a funny one here" (Selvadurai 1994, 14). From there on, Arjie is no longer permitted to play with the girls. This act of interpellation identifies a non-normative behavior, classifying Arjie as a deviant other, which prevents him from acting out his natural inclinations. When he asked his mother why he could no longer play with girls, she glibly replies: "because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly, that's why" (Selvadurai 1994, 19). Her response alludes to basic natural truths of which Arjie's sexuality has no part. Gopinath claims that "the gender specialization of the domestic sphere in the story mirrors and reiterates nationalist framings of space that posit the 'inner' as an atavistic space of spirituality and tradition, embodied by the figure of the woman, as opposed to the 'outer' male sphere of progress politics, materiality, and modernity" (Gopinath 2005, 171). This is most evident in Arjie's desire to play "bride-bride" with his girl cousins as his brother Diggy and the other boys play separately in the "outer" quarters of the house. Once the adults are made aware of Arjie's queer disposition, he is displaced from the "inner" domestic space (the feminized private sphere) to the "outer"

part of house (the masculinized public sphere) to play with the boys. When Arjie is displaced from the “inner” space, we begin to see competing discourses of gender (e.g. normative/conformist and non-normative/nonconformists) wherein Arjie questions gender normalcy and his assigned role as a “boy” in the outer sphere. After this initial gender displacement, Arjie is barred from watching his Amma dress. With these examples in mind, Arjie’s memory of modern sexuality in Sri Lanka is a form of restraint that muted his desires and expressions. His sexual orientation, class, and gender—alongside the novel’s heteronormative yet politically divided setting—emphasize the ways in which “the personal is the political in this novel” (Jayasuriya 2012, 100).

Arjie’s postcolonial memory recreates Sri Lanka as a queer nation state at war with notions of modernity. In other words, Arjie’s memory of Sri Lanka illustrates a transforming nation in a state of perpetual ruin and loss. Jeganathan argues that the “massive Tamil violence of 1983 produced a profound rupture in the narration of Sri Lanka’s modernity” (Jeganathan 2001, 41). In *Funny Boy*, modernity ruptures in two ways. First, there is social and political rupture leading to civil war. Second, there is rupture in Arjie’s identity, that is, in his inability to reconcile his queer self with the roles that society prescribes him, which precludes Arjie from identifying with a social group and from being completely accepted by his family. This dual ruptured sense of

modernity is at work throughout Selvadurai's novel, and it is through the memory of a ruptured past that Arjie revisits his childhood and eventual exile to Canada. He pieces together fragments of Sri Lankan civil unrest and himself, consequently giving life to a fragmented modernity that first exists in Arjie's memory.

Arjie remembers his home as a conventionally domestic space where roles are assigned, desires are restrained, and behaviors are policed. For instance, when Arjie showcases signs of deviance and protests against the rules that govern his domestic space, the language of authority, his mother's word, shuts him down.

'Why can't I play with the girls?' I replied. 'You can't, that's all'. But why?' She shifted uneasily. 'You're a big boy now. And big boys must play with other boys' 'That's stupid.' 'It does not matter,' she said, 'the world is full of stupid things and sometimes we just have to do them. (Selvadurai 1994, 20)

Arjie's dialogue with his Amma demonstrates the novel's two competing gender discourses, conformity and non-conformity. Gopinath argues that the dialectic of "gender conformity and non-conformity are narrativized through competing discourses in the story, where the rhetoric of non-conformity as perversion is undercut by the anti-normative performance of gender in 'Bride-Bride'" (Gopinath 2005, 172). Because Arjie's home is

a heteronormative domestic space, his “anti-normative performance of gender” is often met with authoritative definitiveness, like “the world is full of stupid things” and “because pigs can’t fly” (Selvadurai 1994, 20). Unlike Arjie’s home, Shehan Soyza’s home complicates the home as metaphor for nationality and gender norms. Shehan is a Sinhalese boy from Queen Victoria Academy, who Arjie is attracted to throughout the novel. It is within Shehan’s non-normative home that the boys are granted and agency. Shehan’s home is an anti-modern space that more accurately mirrors the fragmentation, paradoxical mesh, and postcolonial state of Sri Lanka. Thus, it is only within a state of ruin and transformation where the boys freely express their queer desires. Arjie’s constant battle with his own identity is mirrored in the novel’s chaotic state of warfare, a larger societal postcolonial environment that reveals a non-normative nation state, that is, a chaotic state of warfare, violence, and social divide that one may call a queer Nationalism.

Queer Spaces as Queer Nationalism

Because of their non-normative desires, Arjie and Shehan are the novel’s most visibly queer figures. They suffer similar psychological and physical violence oftentimes by the same castigators. Yet their domestic space is vastly different. In the chapter section entitled “The Best of Them All,” Arjie is invited to Shehan’s home. Here, the condition and physical appearance of Shehan’s home reveals

to Arjie that Shehan's mother is absent. Arjie observes:

The inside of the house was in a poor state. The red floor had not been stained for so long that the gray of the cements showed through. The upholstery on the settees was faded, and the wooded arms of the chairs were unvarnished. As I glanced around me, I somehow knew that Shehan didn't have a mother. (Selvadurai 1994, 246; emphasis mine)

This scene exhibits intersections between queer desire, architectural decay, and the mother's place within a modern domestic space, all of which take place in Shehan's bedroom as the boys shamefully discuss Shehan's mother's divorce, the condition of the house, and the remnants of Englishness that seem to persist in the boys' personal and public lives. The decaying state of the house in this scene mirrors a decaying and divided Sri Lanka and the non-normative nature of a divided nation state.

Shehan's house is a symbol for anti-modernity. It is an allegory for lack of unity between Tamil and Sinhalese, the collapsing state of Sri Lanka, and a representation of an attack on the modern state. In this sense, Shehan's home is a space that does not represent material nor political progress. Recalling Gopinath here, the years contextualizing *Funny Boy's* political and cultural memory of violence accentuate Tamil and Sinhalese

combatant discourses for prospective modernity. According to Jeganathan, “literature positions violence as a fury or an eruption, always uncontrolled and unthought . . . explosions [that] are then juxtaposed to restraint or peace; the supposed state or ordinary life in Sinhala society” (Jeganathan 2001, 44). In other words, “violence as a fury or an eruption” *destructures* and unsettles “a state or ordinary life” (Jeganathan 2001, 44). The decay and ruin in Shehan’s home parallels the violence in Sri Lanka’s civil conflict. Thus, both violence and decay are anti-modern because they unsettle an already established order and progress which underline a loss of modernity (i.e., a loss of materiality, progress, civil obedience).

Unshaped by decay and ruin as violence, Shehan’s domestic space also represents the crumbling golden years of the English colonial era (i.e., English modernity) and foreshadows the Sri Lankan Civil War¹. With that said, Shehan as a queer figure occupies a queer postcolonial space, or, as Gopinath says, a space between an inner “atavistic space of spirituality and tradition” and “the outer male sphere of progress politics, materiality, and modernity” (Gopinath 2005, 171). In addition to seeing a non-normative space with the remnants of an imperial power, in Shehan’s motherless home, Arjie also sees “the potential for the free play of fantasy” (Selvadurai 4). Unlike Arjie’s home—where queer expression and desire are not permitted—Shehan’s queer space licenses queer expression in part because it lacks

the structure which often polices and orients gender behavior via “inner” and “outer” polarizing categories.

Shehan’s queer domestic space is full of the remnants of colonial society, with “furniture old and heavy that belonged to another era” (Selvadurai 1994, 246). The society decaying within the walls of Shehan’s queer domestic space is far from Romantic, however. The “old and heavy furnisher” belongs the British colonial era, when Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon. Shehan’s house portrays physical remnants of Ceylon not merely in the furnishings of the house but also through the absence of Shehan’s mother. For instance, in Shehan’s bedroom, Arjie asks, “where is your mother?” Shehan replies that his “parents are separated and that [his] mother lives in England with her new husband” (Selvadurai 1994, 247). Arjie’s curiosity and questions disrupt the eroticism of this scene and “disappoints” Shehan who expected more from Arjie. In Arjie’s memory, Shehan’s queer home is central for understanding Arjie’s queer desires and Sri Lanka’s state of warfare, which are in a constant state of respective sexual and political transformation. In this sense, the dissonances between and among these positionalities are non-identifiable, uncertain, and unfixed “meshes” (as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick might call them): viz., the house is in slow decay; Sri Lanka is in a state of warfare, and Shehan and Arjie are desperately trying to “hook-up” for the first time amidst all this uncertainty and de-structuralization of sovereignty (Selvadurai 1994, 222)².

Funny Boy's romance plot relies on the boys' queer love and desire as much as it does on their shared suffering and restraint. It is within Queen Victoria Academy that Shehan and Arjie react against gender conformity by displaying, what Gopinath calls, an "anti-normative performance of gender" (Gopinath 2005, 172). Queen Victoria Academy is the site for Arjie's sexual awakening. Arjie's Appa enrolls him Queen Victoria Academy because he believes that the school "will force [Arjie] to become a man," that is, to become a heteronormative boy who is not "funny" (Selvadurai 1994, 210). Ironically, however, the school brings Arjie closer to Shehan, who stands out in the backdrop of the Victoria Academy's heteronormative setting. Arjie remembers first meeting Shehan and describes him as:

... having a certain power which gave him immunity from bullies like Salgado. Where it comes from I didn't understand. It was certainly not his physical strength. His long eyelashes and prominent cheekbones gave his face a fragility that looked like it could easily shatter. Yet there was a confidence about him an understanding of his own power. (Selvadurai 1994, 212)³

Bullies like Salgado and Black Tie fetishize queerness in the novel, which in a sense explains where Shehan's power and confidence "comes from" (Selvadurai 1994, 212). For Arjie, however, Shehan's power and confidence are complicated by his own restrained and queer

desires. Arjie is no-doubt attracted to Shehan's ability to be queer with impunity. Arjie notices, "he was daring, for unlike the other boys, he wore his hair long" (Selvadurai 1994, 218). Even though Arjie is in the grip of heteronormative restraint, Shehan's "anti-normative performance of gender" allows Arjie to break away from Black Tie's genderizing structures (Gopinath 2005, 172).

The Queen Victoria Academy represents a homosocial hierarchy where Black Tie is at the top, the prefects in the middle, and "gang leaders" like Salgado and Cheliah are at the bottom. Arjie recalls a scene where he witnesses Cheliah being beaten and sexually assaulted by Salgado and his boys. As Cheliah uses the urinal, Salgado's gang questions and then "grabbed him from behind . . . kicked open the cubicle and the boys crowed inside, dragging Cheliah with them" (Selvadurai 1994, 213). Arjie speeds out of the bathroom to the hallway where he runs into Shehan who then explains to Arjie's the politics of what he witnessed in the bathroom. Shehan claims, "'Cheliah is the leader of the Grade 9 Tamil class' . . . 'So, it's a Sinhala-Tamil thing'" Arjie replies (Selvadurai 1994, 214). As Shehan details the complexity of the "Sinhala-Tamil thing," the Victoria Academy's social hierarchy becomes clearer to Arjie. As it turns out, "Salgado and others like him are in high favor with Lokubandara [and] can do whatever they like" (Selvadurai 1994, 214). Very much like the state of Sri Lanka, the school as Shehan points out is divided in two factions:

“supporters of Black Tie and supporters of Lokubandara” (215). On the one hand, Black Tie represents a Tamilian establishment while Lokubandara, on the other hand, represents an emerging Sinhalese nationalism. In both of these factions, masculinity holds a generative responsibility in shaping gender conformity and violence.

In the Victoria Academy, masculinity is measured by the amount of violence the students can both inflict on others and withstand from Black Tie. The tense battle for authority in Victoria Academy, as Gopinath has argued about the domestic space, is the site of “homosexual desire and cross-gender identification and pleasure, of intense gender conformity and horrific violence” (Gopinath 2005, 155)⁴. The student body is in agreement that pain and violence are part of manhood and masculinity. Diggy tells Arjie on their first day of school about a number of boys who were “disciplined” by Black Tie: “he began to detail punishments one received for getting on [Black Tie’s] bad side. Once he slapped a boy and broke some of his teeth. Another boy in my class got caned so severely his trousers tore. Then he made him kneel in the sun until he fainted” (Selvadurai 1994, 206). When Arjie asks how the boys retaliated to Black Tie’s punishments, Diggy cautions him and says, “Never complain” (Selvadurai 1994, 206). In other words, “once you come to Victoria Academy you are a man. Either you take it like a man or the other boys will look down on you” (Selvadurai 1994, 207). The language of

“taking it like a man” is ambiguously queer. It implies withstanding *penetrating* violence, restraint, and pain (e.g. masochism) as well as being mindlessly subservient to authorities. As headmaster, Black Tie’s disciplining techniques are somewhat sadistic. As Victoria Academy’s most markedly queer figure, Shehan is disciplined more than the other boys. Black Tie tends to call on him to his office more frequently and publicly punishes him in part because of their ethnic differences (i.e., Shehan is Sinhalese and Black Tie, Tamil). In this sense, what motivates Black Tie’s hatred toward Shehan is comparable to what generates the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict, a battle for authority. For Black Tie, Shehan represents the threat of institutional and national reorganization, the loss of authority and the enactment of Lokubandara’s vision for the school: “a Buddhist school” and a nation with “no place for Tamils in it” (Selvadurai 1994, 215)⁵.

It is not incidental or arbitrary that out of the eight parts of Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, only the final chapter section, “Riot Journal: An Epilogue,” is dated. “July 25, 1983” is paramount to the history of Selvadurai’s Sri Lanka, that year being one of Sri Lanka’s most politically and physically violent ones, and that month, “July,” the pinnacle of all of the Tamil-Sinhalese violence. This tumultuous moment is usually referred to as Black July or the anti-Tamil pogrom, a mass scale riot beginning on July 24, 1983 and lasting about seven days where numerous anti-Tamil Sinhalese burned, looted, and destroyed proper-

ty, killing over two thousand Tamilan citizens (Thiranagama 2011, 77). *Funny Boy's* treatment of the anti-Tamil riots has been a topic of interest for literary critics like Maryse Jayasuriya and Gayatri Gopinath who write about Arjie's subjectivity and Sri Lankan civil conflicts. On the one hand, Jayasuriya's book length study of Sri Lankan Anglophone literatures, *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature (1983-2009)* provides a historiographical reading of *Funny Boy* in light of Sri Lankan fiction. Jayasuriya claims that *Funny Boy* highlights the necessity of bearing "witness—to both the communalism that leads to ethnic tensions and violence, and other types of oppression relating to ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation" (Jayasuriya 2012, 100). As Arjie's queer body becomes the site of violence in the novel, so does the nation state of Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Gopinath characterizes the queer diasporic body as a "medium through which home is remapped and its various narratives are displaced, uprooted, and infused with alternative forms of desire" (Gopinath 2005, 165). Gopinath maps a relationship between Arjie's desires and his family's migration through a coming-out narrative about exile. She argues that *Funny Boy* "rearticulates the very notions of exile and sexual subjectivity" (Gopinath 2005, 166). In other words, the visible oppression toward the Tamil people and consequent exile of thousands of Tamils, may be respectively mapped on to Arjie's restrained sexuality (punishment from relatives, prefects, and peers) and his coming out story⁶.

Pradeep Jeganathan argues that violence is a new focus in Sri Lankan anthropology, only seriously considered post 1983, that has since ruptured the narration of Sri Lanka's modernity (Jeganathan 2001, 41). The events of 1983 became "the historical and conceptual condition of possibility for anthropological violence" (Jeganathan 2001, 41)⁷. In Selvadurai's novel, the rupture of violence may be categorized as physical and psychological. For instance, Arjie recalls Black Tie's disciplinary beatings, the murders of his grandparents, Ammachi and Appachi, and the mysterious death of Daryl Uncle. He also remembers the destruction of property in Colombo, the burning of Tamilan homes. Arjie likewise recalls psychologically tortuous moments in a postcolonial setting: the memory of Appa's realization and reaction to his son's "funny" behavior, Amma's sexual frustration with Daryl Uncle, and Arjie's separation from Shehan. These nuanced forms of physical and psychological violence are important for Arjie's postcolonial retrospective retelling.

In conclusion, Arjie's coming-of-age narrative is told through a lens of postcolonial memory. This type of looking back displays the ways in which the colonial past still lingers in the cultural and political ethos of the novel's present Sri Lanka. Black Tie, the Victoria Academy, the poems "Vitae Lampada" and "The Best School of Them All" are memorials erected for the past. This nostalgia for a colonial Ceylon is motivated by the ruins of

that very history, Shehan's house and the fears of political and national change. Whether it is the postcolonial nostalgia for a British imperial power and the crumbling symbols of its reign, or Arjie's own traumatic retrospection of Tamil-Sinhalese conflicts and the cultural restraint and policing of his sexuality at home, the postcolonial memory in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* positions a non-normative state of mind and nation state, queered by the notion of modernity and what it means to be modern.

Notes:

1. Throughout *Funny Boy*, Arjie illustrates a number of ruined and queered objects worth noting. First, Arjie's home is ultimately queered after it is destroyed and transformed into a ruin: "I stood at the gate, staring at the devastation in front of me. If not for the gate, which was still intact, I would never have been able to say that this had been our house" (Selvadurai 1994, 290).

2. Another example is "Pigs Can't Fly," Arjie claims that "Territorially, the area around my grandparents' house was divided in two. The front garden, the road and the field that lay in front of the house belonged to the boys . . . the second territory was called 'the girls', included in which, however, myself, a boy" (Selvadurai 1994, 3). After his careful description, Arjie admits to being attracted to the "free play" and fantasy "the girls" create (Selvadurai 1994, 3). The last example is a space between modernity and atavistic tradition, a queer space.

3. It is important to note that Shehan's mother is Arjie's mother's doppelganger as both women express interest for other men and are ultimately pushed out of Sri Lanka and end up in the western world, the UK and Canada respectively.

4. One may recall this mysterious "confidence" and "power" in the way Arjie sees Radha Aunty in the chapter section titled "Radha Aunty" who is undisturbed by

or inattentive to Tamil-Sinhalese conflict. Thus, Radha Aunty and Shehan showcase a freedom and confidence that Arjie does not see in other characters.

5. One notable example of the Lokubandara (Sinhala) and Black Tie (Tamil) conflict is the name of the school, “Victory Academy.” For instance, “Lokubandara wanted to change the name of the school, which he felt was too British. The name he had in mind was that of a Buddhist priest who had done much to preserve traditional vernacular” (Selvadurai 1994, 215).

6. Some of Black Tie’s disciplining techniques are homoerotic performances. For instance, when Black Tie notices Shehan’s longer hair, “He pulls his head back so that his face was turned up towards him. [Shehan] Soysa’s eyes were open wide with fright. Then Black Tie raised his hand and slapped him . . . Black Tie pulled him forward. ‘Scallywag, he said “don’t ever think you can get away with this in my school. As long as I am principal, we will have discipline in my school”’ (Selvadurai 1994, 217).

7. For more on Sri Lankan Civil War history, see *The Seasons of Trouble: Life Amid the Ruins of Sri Lanka’s Civil War* (2014) by Rohini Mohan and *In My Mother’s House: Civil War in Sri Lanka (the Ethnography of Political Violence)* (2013) by Sharika Thiranagama.

8. Borrowing from Jonathan Spencer's essay, "Collective Violence and Everyday Practice in Sri Lanka," Jegathan delineates the anthropological body of Sri Lankan violence, which Spencer claims is rarely practiced regardless of how often it is paired with Sri Lankan history. Spencer explains, "the relative invisibility of violence in day to day life can be linked to the strong emphasis on restrained village social life" (606).

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