

Postcolonial Memory, Queer Nationality, and Modernity: Nostalgia and Retrospection in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*

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Abstract:

In this paper, I argue that *Funny Boy*'s postcolonial memory works in two important ways: First, in the nostalgic mode, the novel's postcolonial memory is a way of longing for a fleeting colonial past which haunts the cultural consciousness of colonial sympathizers in the novel. Second, in 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 homophobia. In this sense, postcolonial memory, in *Funny Boy*, both illustrates Arjie's individual coming-of-age story as well as the civil, ethnic, and social conflicts leading up to one Sri Lanka's most politically vexed years. Furthermore, Arjie's first-person recollection of Tamil-Sinhalese conflicts and Sri Lanka's state of warfare intersects with his first love interest, Shehan Soyza, giving voice to queer expression and desire during times of war and civil unrest. In *Funny Boy*, the oppositional force that generates violence and restraint is the irreconcilability of the past and present, the normative and non-normative, and, ultimately, the modern and non-modern. In this sense, violence and restraint become byproducts of modernity both in terms of Arjie's sexuality and Sri Lankan nationalism.

Keywords: Memory; Nostalgia; Retrospection; *Funny Boy*; Sri Lanka; Nationalism.