

**Indigenizing Sexuality and National  
Citizenship: Shyam Selvadurai's  
*Cinnamon Gardens***  
Heather Smyth

The intersection of feminist and postcolonial critique has enabled us to understand some of the co-implications of gendering, sexuality, and postcolonial nation building. Anne McClintock, for instance, argues that nations “are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed” and that “nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*” (89; italics in original). Women’s reproduction is put to service for the nation in both concrete and symbolic ways: women reproduce ethnicity biologically (by bearing children) and symbolically (by representing core cultural values), and the injunction to women to reproduce within the norms of marriage and ethnic identification, or heterosexual endogamy, makes women also “reproducers of the *boundaries* of ethnic/national groups” (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 8–9; emphasis added). National identity may be routed through gender, sexuality, and class, such that “respectability” and bourgeois norms, including heterosexuality, are seen as essential to nationalism, perhaps most notably in nations seeking independence from colonial power (Mosse; de Mel). Shyam Selvadurai’s historical novel *Cinnamon Gardens*, set in 1927–28 Ceylon, is a valuable contribution to the study of gender and sexuality in national discourses, for it explores in nuanced ways the roots of gender norms and policed sexuality in nation building. *Cinnamon Gardens* indigenizes Ceylonese/Sri Lankan homosexuality not by invoking the available rich history of precolonial alternative sexualities in South Asia, but rather by tying sexuality to the novel’s other themes of nationalism, ethnic conflict, and women’s emancipation. This article will argue that, although the novel rarely links sexuality overtly to the nation, Selvadurai in fact makes the link through the tension between endogamy and exogamy. Ethnicity

and women's emancipation may be the overt flashpoints for nationalism in Selvadurai's novel, but he brings sexuality to the forefront by linking it with narratives focusing on the surveillance of reproductive choices, especially the rules regarding proximity and distance in kinship ties for marriage partners. Sameness/difference in ethnic terms, I argue here, functions in Selvadurai's novel as a parallel to same-sex/different-sex relationships.

That Selvadurai's attention to alternative sexualities in early twentieth century Ceylon must be directed slantwise, as it were, attests to the non-centrality of this cultural history in Sri Lankan scholarship, and the pressing need for an at least imaginative attention to its material history.<sup>1</sup> Tony Ballantyne points out that the paucity of attention to gender and the cultural history of emotion in South Asian historiographic work means that the "small voices" (the term is Ranajit Guha's) of subaltern figures such as women can be found primarily in personal archives, where they are "fleeting traces and isolated textual fragments" (106). Selvadurai's epigraph declares that he intends to show the connection between "unhistoric" and "hidden" personal lives and historical forces in Ceylon (*Cinnamon Gardens* n.p.), and he makes sexuality historical not so much by revealing an archive of contemporary sexually diverse Ceylonese figures, but rather by linking sexuality to the more historically central issue of ethnicity. We might speculate that Selvadurai's preference for a realist form of narrative precludes his invoking precolonial Ceylonese examples of alternative sexual and gender roles and anachronistically bringing them to 1920s Ceylon.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he has noted the extent to which Western ideas of "bourgeois respectability [and] Victorian morality" permeated Ceylon/Sri Lanka (Marks 7). He does, though, present us with two more direct examples of indigenous connections to alternative sexualities that must be noted before this discussion takes up the 'indirect' argument. First, one of the two central characters, Balendran, comes into contact with the historical figure Edward Carpenter during his time in England with his British lover, Richard. Carpenter, a radical British political thinker and early defender of homosexual identity, could be one means for the novel to indigenize alternative sexualities in Ceylon because of his connection with

the anticolonial Ceylonese nationalist Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam. Carpenter and Arunachalam shared a long intellectual exchange and close friendship in England, and Carpenter accompanied Arunachalam to Ceylon and India in 1890 to meet a guru and learn Hindu philosophy. Arunachalam is credited with having a profound influence on Carpenter's political and sexual philosophy, although there is no evidence of a directly sexual relationship (Aldrich 290–98; Delavenay 54). Several of the novel's key preoccupations are brought together in this very brief meeting: Arunachalam's nationalism (he led the Ceylon Reform League and later the Ceylon National Congress), his obvious approval of Carpenter, and the positive relationship that Carpenter and his companion George Merrill model for Balendran and Richard during their visit (*Cinnamon* 59). Homosexuality is here linked in narrative proximity to Ceylonese nationalism, albeit in an English setting. Secondly, Selvadurai offers the example of Srimani and her coterie: a group of counter-culture artists who combine alternative sexual and gender roles with Sinhalese and otherwise precolonial Ceylonese signifiers in dress, food, and culture (293, 375). Annalukshmi, Balendran's niece, briefly meets this group twice through her erstwhile suitor Chandrin Macintosh and Mr. Jayaweera, her school's accountant. It is significant, however, that Balendran, the novel's primary gay character, is never brought in contact with this group. While Wickramagamage's assessment of this scene as "strangely and disappointingly reminiscent of colonialist depictions of Oriental excess" may not fully measure its possible queer liberationist resonances, she may be correct that the example of Srimani is "limited in its applications" because of its suggestion of an "individualistic non-conformity" that Annalukshmi (and one could add Balendran) is not ready to embrace (137–38).

This discussion will begin by outlining the historical frame into which Selvadurai inserts these personal narratives. The overlying political context for the novel is one of constitutional, and potentially anticolonial, reform. Since the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833, the Crown Colony of Ceylon had a unified administration under the auspices of a Governor in consultation with an Executive Council. The governor-nominated members of the Legislative Council, including Sinhalese,

Tamil, and Burgher unofficial representatives, advised the governor on legislation (Jeffries 25; Mills 72). The Sinhalese-Muslim riots of 1915, during which British authorities imposed martial law and harshly punished Sinhalese Buddhists, altered the orientation of many Sri Lankans towards British rule, for as K.M. de Silva notes, “the disturbances shattered Sri Lankan—and especially Sinhalese—illusions about the colonial administration’s commitment to justice and fair play” (*Managing* 62). Moreover, constitutional reforms in 1920 and 1923–24 brought more Ceylonese to the Legislative Council through communal (ethnic) elected representation and created unofficial positions on the Executive Council (Mills 267; Wilson 4). This series of events contributed to a growing movement towards reform among the anticolonial nationalists of the Young Lanka League and the working class movement, both led by A.E. Goonesinha, and on the part of the educated elite who formed the Ceylon National Congress in 1919 (Scott 165–66; de Silva, *History* 386).

Selvadurai’s novel is set in 1927–1928 Ceylon, during the Donoughmore Commission’s inquiry into the possibility of Ceylon’s self-rule. This commission, led by England’s Lord Donoughmore, set out to investigate the reform of Ceylon’s constitution; the Donoughmore Report subsequently commented on the need to combine an increase in responsible government for Ceylon with extension of the franchise (Jayawardena, *Rise* 265–67). This historical context foregrounds Ceylon’s negotiation of rights and citizenship, for extending the franchise at that time—which was limited to the 4% of the population who were male, educated, and wealthy (de Silva, *Managing* 51)—prompted debates in Ceylon about the status of women, the poor, and the lower castes. It is a historical moment, too, that illustrates some of the tensions between minority rights and democratic structures. As David Scott points out, the Donoughmore Commission’s recommendations, which were “of inaugural importance in Sri Lankan constitutional history,” were designed to promote democracy and a democratic ethos through the extension of franchise and the disabling of communal politics (164–65). The principle of majoritarianism within modern liberal democracy, he points out, meant that ethnic affiliations had to be subordinated to demo-

cratic representation. Ultimately, however, “the secular Enlightenment project inscribed into the organization of colonial Ceylon politics by the Donoughmore Commission merely enabled, from the 1930s onward, the emergence of the political dominance of the majority—i.e. Sinhala—community” (171–72). And as de Silva argues, “universal suffrage...became the main determining factor in the re-emergence of ‘religious’ nationalism” (*Managing* 30), with the repercussions for civil war that eventually followed. In this context, Selvadurai’s novel offers a reflection on both the liberating possibilities of democratic nationalism and the extension of franchise—for women and the poor, for instance—and also on the precariousness of minority identities within the national community, whether that be religious/ethnic minorities, or sexual minorities.

These issues are illustrated in the novel through narratives focusing on two characters, Annalukshmi and Balendran. Twenty-two year old Annalukshmi considers herself a “new woman” (*CG* 5), and with her level of education and her unconventional behaviour tests her society’s gender conventions. The novel explores her “constraints” (3) and her choices, and puts Annalukshmi’s decisions about career and marriage in the context of the Women’s Franchise Union’s debates about the political and domestic role of Ceylonese women. Her uncle Balendran is enjoined by his father, the Mudaliyar, to petition the Donoughmore Commission on behalf of the Ceylon Tamil Association through his former relationship with Richard Howland, whom the Mudaliyar believes is an assistant with the Commission. His request prompts Balendran to remember his romantic relationship with Richard in their London university days, his father’s brutal prohibition of the union, and the choice Balendran made to give up a gay relationship for a socially sanctioned marriage to Sonia. The roles that gender and women’s rights play in nation-building might be taken for granted with this novel, for the “emancipation” of the heroine, Annalukshmi, is openly linked with the political role played by women’s groups during the Donoughmore hearings. Yet the novel’s other parallel plot, focusing on the closeted Balendran and his relationship with his politically powerful father, is, I argue, just as important to the issue of nation-building, as it demonstrates the ways that

sexuality shapes national discourses. Selvadurai shows that sexuality constitutes public, national subjects, and is not merely a private matter, and he does so through his creation of interwoven narratives focusing on women's suffrage in Ceylon, Balendran's embattled gay identity, the expulsion of Balendran's brother Arul from the family for a cross-caste marriage, and Ceylon's exploration of options for nation-state identity. *Cinnamon Gardens* is premised on the understanding that Ceylon must find inclusive ways of imagining itself as a nation, and if ethnicity, class, caste, and gender were the categories through which 1920s Ceylon experienced diversity in its nation-building, Selvadurai is presenting an argument—non-anachronistically, this article argues—that sexuality is another category through which national citizens must be imagined. These four narratives lie in close proximity to each other, and it is clear that the social systems that underpin them—gender norms, caste restrictions, heterosexism, and nationalism—mutually constitute each other, for as Lynne Pearce points out, “colonial/nationalist discourses and heterosexism” are connected structurally (254). This article seeks to perform what Pearce describes as the necessary “analysis of how different, but comparable, orthodoxies are maintained and always threaten to reproduce themselves” (255).

These speculations about the linked functions of ethnic and sexual discourses are assisted in part by Greg Mullins' essay on US asylum laws and the conjunction of sexual orientation and ethnicity. In determining, through US refugee regulations, whether kinship is an innate characteristic that holds up as grounds for refugee claims, he speculates on the “elasticity of kinship considered as the basis of a social group”:

Starting with the nuclear family, moving to other close relations, from there to subclan and clan, could kinship ties extend to an entire ethnicity? Kinship does not define ethnicity, but there is a metaphorical association between them. Understood as a sense of relatedness through common origins, ethnicity shares with kinship the notions of heritage and of interconnection through marriage and reproduction. Extending kinship through generations involves biological reproduction; extend-

ing ethnicity through generations involves social reproduction. The impetus for biological and social reproduction often merges, in which case ethnicity can, in some cases, be defined through heterosexual relations, to the exclusion of non-reproductive forms of sexual expression. (157)

Mullins examines analogies between ethnic and homophobic persecution in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and two Cuban texts, but does not fully apply his insight to Selvadurai's text, leaving room for a fuller examination of the parallels between ethnicity and sexual orientation. We can take advantage of this elasticity of the concept of kinship and its marking of inside/outside and of relationships distinguished by associations that are too close or too removed for acceptability. Kinship rules determine which reproductive relationships are too close (endogamous) for a society, and ethnic divisions mark which reproductive relationships are too different (exogamous) for a society. Ceylon/Sri Lanka is exemplary for the ways in which ethnicity has become naturalized under the political pressures of colonialism and state building. As Suvendrini Perera points out,

From colonial Ceylon to republican Sri Lanka, the logic of apartness and separation, of distinct racial 'types' and categories, has provided a continuity to official policy-making.... Independence marked the end of a long process during which multiple points of identification and difference between peoples (along lines of language, geography, religion, gender, class, caste) were re-ordered into four distinct groupings: 'Burger', 'Muslim', 'Tamil', 'Sinhala'. (191)

This solidification of ethnic divisions, argues Perera, is "the story of the post-independence state, its adoption of a politics of ethno-nationalism, and the blatant 'competitive chauvinism' of its key political parties" (192). Similarly, as Jeanne Marecek clarifies, "ethnic" is in many ways a "convenient misnomer" in Sri Lanka as a term describing the country's divisions and conflicts: religion, language, and place of residence may all internally divide an "ethnic group" (141). The violent repercussions of what is termed ethnic division in Sri Lanka cannot be set aside

from this discussion—Selvadurai's first novel addresses them directly and ties them to sexuality—but at the same time my focus here will be more on the ways differences can be naturalized, and the applicability of ethnic frames of reference to sexual contexts, and less on the specific forms ethnic division has taken in Ceylon/Sri Lanka. *Cinnamon Gardens* allows us to compare the social taboos corresponding to sameness and difference in kinship/ethnicity, with the sameness/difference of same-sex or opposite-sex unions, and incorporate this insight into an analysis of the novel's interconnected plots.

The few critical treatments of Selvadurai's novel have sometimes remarked on the multiplicity of subplots and themes. S.W. Perera, for instance, considers that "Selvadurai takes on too many themes from too many angles. Not only do these themes impinge on each other, but they affect his artistic focus" (108). Vera Alexander calls the novel "crowded," and speculates that the effect of "disorder and confusion" caused by the multiple themes of "politics, family scandals, gayness, emancipation" was "at least partly intentional," though she does not speculate on a motive (155). Rather than being a narrative flaw, however, or even a deliberate tactic of creating confusion for the reader, the multiple subplots fit together quite purposefully in a way that sometimes illuminates parallels between the themes, and sometimes points up contradictions in the social norms that shape Ceylon at the threshold of independence. Some of the connections may be heavy-handed, such as the obviousness of the Mudaliyar's representation of the continuation of British imperialism at the level of his own household. It is not so obvious, perhaps, that the Mudaliyar's control over Balendran's sexuality thereby throws light on the shared space of colonial domination and heteronormative domination. Marta González Acosta, it is worth noting, accounts for the multiple plots by marking their contribution towards a narrative pattern that she compares with the pattern found in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*: for instance, she assesses the contribution to Balendran's narrative of plots relating to Arul and the Mudaliyar by comparing their narratological function with those of the brother and father in *Funny Boy*. She emphasizes, however, that Balendran's story is a narrative of decisions and consequences, and that his role is to symbolize "an *intimate*



catharsis,” not a “heroic landmark...of gender struggle” (245). As I will argue, however, the multiple plots of the novel are conjoined in effect to show the historicity and national scope of Balendran’s crisis. My argument will proceed, therefore, with an outline of the four main narrative threads of the novel—Annalukshmi’s “liberation,” Arul’s banishment, Balendran’s sexuality, and Ceylon’s national identity—to show how each plot is tied to the others.

The novel opens with Annalukshmi’s reflections on her “constraints” and freedoms, her decisions about marriage, and the state of women’s liberation in both England and Ceylon (*Cinammon* 3). Annalukshmi is considered over-educated even for a woman of her class, and her professional career as a teacher “was held to be her greatest crime” by her relatives (3). Rather than ride to work in a rickshaw, carefully shaded by an umbrella so that she does not “turn black,” Annalukshmi prefers the sensual pleasures of an energetic bicycle ride, and the sensation that she is thereby flouting “the ridiculous conventions of society” (16, 9). The extent to which her conception of liberation has been shaped by the eminently colonialist headmistress Miss Lawton has been examined elsewhere (Wickramagama), and will be set aside for the moment. What is interesting here about Annalukshmi is the novel’s frequent repetition of her family’s concern with her “reputation” (4), relevant in both the Ceylonese context and in the context of the nineteenth-century novel of manners tradition that *Cinnamon Gardens* invokes. Her public bicycle ride is the culmination of behaviour that has marked Annalukshmi as “fast” and at risk of in chastity, and it prompts her mother and aunt to rush her into arranged marriage negotiations.

Annalukshmi’s reputation, the regulation of her sexuality and gendered behaviour, matters because on that reputation rests her own, and her sisters’, chances for a good marriage and economic security. But what is at stake is also larger than one family, and embraces the themes of postcolonial nationalism and ethnicity. The educated elite class of Ceylonese to which Annalukshmi belongs is highly invested in maintaining a bourgeois respectability that will “earn” them the eventual “right” to sovereignty. This is, in part, what the novel’s setting is about: the demonstration by the Ceylonese to the British, through the venue

of the Donoughmore Commission, that they are “civilized” enough to warrant self-government.<sup>3</sup> Neloufer de Mel points out that “nationalism in the colonies...forg[ed] alliances with bourgeois respectability to stave off challenges to its dominance by colonialism” (104). Women’s modesty, among other precepts, is aligned with “national respectability,” whether routed through British Victorian and Christian middle-class mores or Buddhist and Hindu traditions (de Mel 105; Marecek 141–42). *Cinnamon Gardens* stages this tension through a debate about the vote for women: for Annalukshmi’s aunt Philomena, who favours the opinion of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Tamil reputation itself is at stake: “the purity, the nobility, the modesty of women would be ruined if they are given the vote” (118). Women who involve themselves in politics, according to her, cease to be “normal women”—they become “manly” (117). The behaviour of women like Annalukshmi, then, is particularly under surveillance as the powerful classes of Ceylon both demonstrate to the British their readiness for nationhood, and also determine for themselves what kind of nation they want to be. The latter imperative may, in fact, conflict with the former, but both place particular burdens upon women. Within anticolonial nationalism, particularly in the 1920s, as de Mel points out, women became the bearers not of strictly British customs, but rather of “reinvent[ed] tradition” (7). “The emerging nation,” she argues, required women to be “guardians of its culture,” demonstrating traditional cultural elements that colonialism had de-emphasized, including but not limited to women’s clothing (116). Culture can be conflated with “family” and “home,” and women become symbolic boundary markers for whatever forms of culture the nation wants to emphasize on the continuum of colonial to traditional—they must be “both ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’” (Jayawardena, *Feminism* 14). Annalukshmi reflects on the failure of even anticolonial nationalist movements to consider the place of gender in their concept of sovereignty: “the bid for self-rule did not promise to provide her with any greater freedom, any amelioration of her position as a woman, that had not already been achieved under colonial rule” (115). Women’s reproduction—the reproduction and raising of the next generation of citizens—therefore takes on value for culture and nation.

Moreover, Annalukshmi has the task of reproducing her class, as well, for her potential marriage partners must be screened and found to be from “good” families—in other words, her duty to family, class, and nation is to make an endogamous marriage.<sup>4</sup>

Annalukshmi, however, is not the only character whose sexual or reproductive choices are surveilled within the family. Balendran’s brother Arul is banished from his high-caste family because he marries outside his caste, which effectively disables him, especially as the elder son, from reproducing the next generation within the acknowledged and socially sanctioned space of the family. Balendran articulates how Arul’s marriage to Pakkiam, the family’s former servant, is too exogamous: “His brother was the son of a rich landowner, educated in English and European culture. He had spent his life in luxury. She was a Koviari, a low caste. As such, Pakkiam belonged to a different world” (230). Balendran cannot imagine how they could overcome their “differences” (230). To Arul’s father, the Mudaliyar, this exogamous marriage has “tainted” the blood of his grandson Seelan (316)—while Arul is “still of their blood,” Seelan is lost to the family by “the blood he carried in him” (237). Arul is still tied to his “lineage” and “heritage,” and upon his death may be returned to the family, but his son cannot be, creating a broken line in the family tree (237).

Caste and sexuality become linked in these narratives in a number of ways. First, when the Mudaliyar banished Arul from the household twenty-eight years earlier, he decreed that Arul’s name could not be spoken in the home. Yet Arul’s mother and the servant Pillai maintain contact with him and his memory remains, making him an open secret. This, as well as Balendran’s reflections on Arul’s “alternate life in Bombay” (231), bring to mind the parallels with Balendran’s life with Richard in London or his clandestine meetings with his lover Ranjan at the Bambalapitiya train station, which could be seen as “alternate lives” and also “open secrets,” for the Mudaliyar and Balendran never speak again about the father’s discovery of his son’s sexuality, although Balendran is aware that his father remembers (31). The Mudaliyar himself also has an “alternate life” with his extramarital affairs, first with Pakkiam’s mother and later with his American secretary Miss Adamson.

These relationships are clandestine both for their non-monogamy and for their illicit crossing of caste/racial lines (their exogamy). The “open secret” or “alternate life,” therefore, is a theme shared across a number of narratives, linking Balendran’s sexuality with that of his father and brother, and linking it to caste, race, and ethnicity: the theme of the “double life,” in fact, is announced in the Tirukkural epigraph that heads a chapter interconnecting these narratives (301). The connection also makes Balendran aware of what could have happened to him had he opted for an openly gay life and, like Arul, chosen a disallowed relationship, although the repercussions would presumably have been much more catastrophic for Balendran. These connections come together sharply in a conversation where the dying Arul tells Balendran, “You have spent your whole life living by codes everyone lays down but nobody follows....Some of us obey in spite of our natures. Others only make a pretence” (273–75). Arul then implicitly compares his decision to marry Pakkiam, Balendran’s “stay in England” with Richard, and the Mudaliyar’s affair with Pakkiam’s mother (275), claiming an equivalence between these infractions of social codes that leaves Balendran startled by his brother’s acceptance of his “inversion” (277).<sup>5</sup> Balendran himself is later willing to compare sexual and caste infractions when his nephew’s humiliation by the Mudaliyar reminds him of his own humiliation by his father in England: he vows, “he would not let his father dictate Seelan’s destiny. At least one of them would escape from his clutches” (363).

The connection between caste and sexuality is further emphasized in a scene in which Balendran remembers his brother’s early relationship with Pakkiam. He distinguishes himself from his brother, pointing to Arul’s “love of the outdoors” and “forceful personality” in contrast to Balendran’s “effeminate” preference for reading (232). Before Pakkiam eloped with Arul, she began mocking Balendran’s sexuality, and would “glance at his thin, awkward body and smirk” (233). Balendran despaired that he “did not have the manliness to deal with a female servant” (233). In retrospect, Balendran realizes Pakkiam was seeking power over him in respect to gender presentation at a moment when she was acutely aware of her vulnerability in terms of caste: it was “an attempt

to lift herself to his level, to be considered his equal” (233). Although both cross-caste sexuality (marriage) and homosexuality are forbidden, Pakkiam realizes her advantage.

Some of the parallels between Arul and Balendran cannot be fully sustained: for instance, clearly Balendran’s conflict with his father over his homosexuality is not merely about the Mudaliyar’s fear he will not reproduce the next generation of children. Yet both Arul’s marriage outside of caste and Balendran’s sexual orientation can, on one level, be seen as roadblocks to the organized transmission of kinship, caste, and ethnicity through a family. Lynne Pearce points out that an “emerging nation [might] require its subjects to prioritize their national identification...in the form of an explicitly *procreative* sexual politics,” and also that ethnicity, to the extent that it “constitutes ‘a national identity’” requires “some investment, however residual, in the heterosexual nuclear family” (245). Rules for exogamy and endogamy, then, mark the appropriate frames for sexual reproduction, reproduction of ethnicity, and hence the reproduction of the nation, and they outlaw relationships between partners who are too similar or too different. Arul’s cross-caste marriage breaks the line in the family tree and therefore imperils the Tamil status in the nation, but so could Balendran’s homosexuality, at least metaphorically, should he choose a life with his male partner—a partner who is not “different” enough (that is, not a woman). Critics such as R. Raj Rao and Terry Goldie have pointed out that ethnicity and sexuality are both implicated in Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* when Arjie’s mother explains the reason against interracial or interethnic marriage: “Because most people marry their own kind” (*Funny Boy* 54). Her reference to “own kind” is not meant to refer to same-sex unions, but in the context of the novel the ironic cross-reference is clear. The quotation dovetails nicely with *Cinnamon Gardens*’ connection between ethnicity and sexuality, for although the social injunctions are opposites—endogamy for race and ethnicity, exogamy for sex and gender—they are made to be of the same order.

The validity of this comparison is supported by the novel’s revelation that Balendran’s sexuality is not the only forbidden kind, which puts him in a wider context that embraces ethnicity and caste. The novel

questions the “naturalness” of a number of kinds of sexuality, and points out that Balendran’s marriage to Sonia—while otherwise mainstream in its heterosexuality—barely escapes being a forbidden union. Balendran and Sonia are first cousins, the son and daughter of two brothers. The novel points out, “In high-caste Tamil society, the marrying of cousins who were the children of a sister and a brother was held in esteem” whereas “the marriage of the children of two brothers or two sisters was considered almost incestuous” (CG 52). The line here between acceptable and unacceptable is quite thin: the former kind of union, while endogamous in its effort to “[keep] wealth within a family” and ensure the extended family will not “be strangers” to each other, is considered just exogamous enough to escape incest. What saves Balendran and Sonia’s marriage from this charge is her mixed cultural and racial heritage: her father was Ceylonese but her mother was “an Englishwoman,” and Sonia was raised in England. That she was “of half foreign blood” and “a stranger to Ceylon” had “mitigated the objections” (53). Again, a leaven of differences produces the “right” balance between endogamy and exogamy, weighing ethnic and class purity against incest. The rules for this balance seem complicated, and emphasize the cultural specificity of sexuality and sexual norms. This, in turn, provides a context for tying Balendran’s sexuality more firmly to the issues of ethnicity and family in the novel. Rather than lying in some marginal space outside the world of 1920s Ceylon, Balendran’s sexuality can be seen in Selvadurai’s novel as very much a part of his society’s negotiation of kinship, ethnicity, and reproduction.

*Cinnamon Gardens* demonstrates that the “private” world of love is not so private when the needs of family, class, ethnicity, and nation are under perceived threat. Selvadurai shows indirectly the connections between homosexuality and the nation by tying Balendran’s crisis to the plotlines relating to gender and ethnicity, which have more overt connections to nationalism in this novel. At the same time, there are several more direct connections between homosexuality and nationalism. One of these connections hinges on the character of F.C. Wijewardena, a friend of Balendran’s. F.C. plays a public national role in the Ceylon National Congress, lobbying the Donoughmore Commission to not

extend universal franchise to the poor, yet Balendran also learns that F.C. sent an anonymous note to the Mudaliyar back in their London schooldays, exposing Balendran's sexual relationship with Richard Howland to his father. Balendran comes to understand the power F.C. had over him because of his marginalized sexuality, and he relates this to F.C.'s colonial elitism in the national context when he confronts him publicly:

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 who are like that. (166)

Balendran's language makes a personal application of these criticisms obvious: he is enraged at F.C. for meddling in his personal life and ending his relationship with Richard. But beyond the private parallel, a broader connection between sexuality, nationalism, and colonialism is also implied. F.C., in this exchange, stands in for the way that British colonialism brought with it an imposition not just of political structure and British culture, but also of sexual and gender identities. J. Kehaulani Kauanui argues that "Westerners, through various forms of colonization, distorted the sexuality and gender constructions of colonized peoples" (182). Scholars such as Anne Laura Stoler have pointed out how "affirmations of a [European] bourgeois self" in a sexual sense were formed through the process of colonial contact—that is, a sense of the superiority of European sexual norms developed through comparison with indigenous colonized practices. In turn, this European bourgeois sexual morality was imposed in the colonies as a measure of racial power and control (7). The Portuguese, Dutch, and British imperialists in Ceylon, and later local members of the Anglicized Ceylonese bourgeoisie, sought an end to indigenous Ceylonese practices such as "matriarchy, tolerant sexual mores, polyandry and divorce by mutual consent" (Jayawardena, *Feminism* 9). Jeanne Marecek confirms that in Ceylon,

“[t]he successive waves of colonizers had imposed changes in marriage, gender relations and sexual practices, bringing them more into line with Western norms” (142). “Christianization transformed sexual behavior into a moral issue,” argues Marecek, and “under British rule, sexual behavior and family life came under state regulation” (142).

As a national figure, too, F.C. stands in for the ways that nations surveil sexuality. Richard discusses with his lover Alli how F.C.’s anonymous letter led the Mudaliyar to the London flat he shared with Balendran. The Mudaliyar threatened Richard that he would report him to the police for the crime of sodomy, and Richard reminds Alli of how recent had been the Oscar Wilde trial, and hence the force of the threat. The invocation of Wilde’s trial also reminds the reader of the state’s power to punish acts of homosexuality: as Richard tells Alli, “Our lives are so fragile. One word to the law can shatter our lives into a thousand pieces” (CG 141). The criminalizing of alternative sexualities is very much a part not just of a nation’s exertion of its power, but of a nation’s construction of itself. As Gayatri Gopinath has argued,

Within the familial and domestic space of the nation as imagined community, non-heteronormative sexuality is either criminalized, or disavowed and elided; it is seen as a threat to national integrity and as perpetually outside the boundaries of nation, home, and family. . . . the nation demands heterosexuality as a prerequisite of ‘good citizenship,’ since it depends on the family as a reproductive unit through which the stability of gender roles and hierarchies is preserved. Heterosexuality, in other words, is fundamental to the way in which the nation imagines itself. (469)

With *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai brings non-heteronormative sexuality back into “the boundaries of nation, home, and family” by showing how ethnicity and sexuality are connected through anxieties about reproduction that circulate within familial, ethnic, and national spaces. The novel demonstrates how, at moments of intense national self-scrutiny, the “private” world of love is called upon to symbolize public, national values. The narratives of Annalukshmi and Arul illustrate in



microcosm the power negotiations of class, caste, gender, and ethnicity that mark Ceylon in the early twentieth century. Within these struggles, zones of sameness and difference, of self and other, are marked out. By tying Balendran's narrative of gay sexuality to these other themes, Selvadurai invites us to see sexuality as integrally bound up with national imagining. His novel thus contributes to discussions in postcolonial studies about nationalism and belonging. Minoli Salgado notes that "Sri Lankan literature since the war...brings to crisis many of the key debates in postcolonial studies reflecting struggles over issues of legitimacy, authenticity, canonicity and the politics and representation of belonging and exclusion" (16). As such, Sri Lankan literature exhibits a tension between "an overdetermined spatial discourse" of political geography, and profound cultural shifts: this tension offers "the conditions of possibility for the emergence of new narratives of belonging" (Salgado 17). Selvadurai's "new narratives of belonging," he suggests, claim both Sri Lankan and diasporic identification: he situates his writing in the hyphenated "space between" Sri Lankan and Canadian writing, and points out that while his novels are set in Sri Lanka, their representations of feminism and gay experience are enabled by his location in Canada: "It was very clear to me that the pure sense of being Sri Lankan was based on rigid heterosexual and gender roles...By being gay, was I no longer Sri Lankan?" (Selvadurai, "Introducing" 1-4). At the same time, by indigenizing and legitimizing gay sexuality in Sri Lankan space and history, *Cinnamon Gardens* productively adds to postcolonial examinations of the dynamics of difference within the national frame.<sup>6</sup> The Ceylonese/Sri Lankan example clearly shows the pitfalls of assuming a monolithic identity for the nation: *Cinnamon Gardens* illustrates the need for the postcolonial nation to imagine for itself increasingly pluralized identities.

Taking Lynne Pearce's point that "different, but comparable, orthodoxies" can, indeed must, be analyzed together, this essay has proposed that *Cinnamon Gardens* puts ethnicity and sexuality in close proximity so we can examine, and question, the taboos shaping discourses about each orthodoxy. If the line dividing endogamy from exogamy in kinship/ethnic structures is flexible, I have argued here, we might also see

the taboos surrounding homosexuality, and the injunction to heterosexuality, as also shifting and open to negotiation, even in the historical context that frames *Cinnamon Gardens*. While the setting of *Cinnamon Gardens* pre-dates an era of public, nation-state level mobilization on behalf of non-heterosexual subjectivities,<sup>7</sup> the threads that tie sexuality to nation, gender, and ethnicity in this novel gesture to the implication of the sexual in the national, and, conversely, the role the national could play in the achievement of social justice.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

1 Selvadurai's novel has multiple sites of critical impact and categorization that deserve mention. His work in general has been categorized as "transcultural" (Alexander 139), "Sri Lankan expatriate writing" (S.W. Perera 87), "queer ethnic performance" (Banerjee 149), "gay fiction" (Rao 118), and "gay Asian American writing" (Murray 111). Rajiva Wijesinha argues that for Sri Lankan writers in English such as Selvadurai, "the English language has been a liberating influence with regard to the presentation of sexuality" (72). In a book-length study that is itself about boundary marking and categorization, Minoli Salgado examines the novel as an example of "Sri Lankan writing in English," which can include both resident and migrant writers whose work belongs to "two distinct, asymmetrical Sri Lankan literary canons" and fields of critical reception (2-4). Salgado argues that "Sri Lankan literature in English constitutes an emergent canon of writing that has yet to find settlement in the field of postcolonial studies" (9). Chelva Kanaganayakam treats Selvadurai as a Sri Lankan writer in English, and contextualizes the writer and his work with reference to the language of writing (English rather than Tamil), his diasporic status, and the specificity of the language world in which characters circulate (in *Funny Boy*, a syncretic Colombo Tamil) ("Literature" 37; "Dancing" 61). Eleanor Ty, on the other hand, proposes that novels like Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (and I believe we can include *Cinnamon Gardens*) can productively be labelled "Asian global narratives," which includes, among three criteria, "works authored by Asians in North America, Britain, or Australia, but whose subject matter have little or nothing to do with the adopted country of the authors" (240). Rocío G. Davis incorporates a pan-Asian collection of texts, including works by Selvadurai, under headings such as "Asian North American" and "Asian American" (see, for example, *Begin Here* and *Literary Gestures*). I am hesitant to restrict study of Selvadurai's work to a particular field: he has clearly been embraced within Canadian literary studies, has had an impact within Sri Lanka, and addresses issues of concern to wider postcolonial studies. I begin this article with questions of the role of gender in postcolonial nationalism, and draw conclusions that are implicated

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- in postcolonial studies, but am primarily concerned during the analysis with Ceylonese/Sri Lankan frames of reference. As Benedict Maher points out, “In a society riven with near feudal distinctions of class, ethnicity and region, colonialism represented merely *one* form of oppression (albeit a vastly significant one)” in the time period of *Cinnamon Gardens* (113).
- 2 While scholarship exists that documents non-Western indigenous forms of South Asian “homosexuality” or gender variance, some problems have been encountered. For example, Jigna Desai points out the “multivalenced and contradictory connections between diaspora and homeland” that are revealed in “the desire to claim histories in Asian cultures and seek representations of Asian ‘lesbians’ ...in teleological narratives beginning with the *Kama Sutra* and ending with contemporary Asian American lesbians” (82). *A Lotus of Another Color*, while groundbreaking as a text that attempts to indigenize South Asian queer sexualities, suffers from, as Jasbir K. Puar puts it, a “static construction of India” that collapses all South Asian cultural, religious, and class identities into “an unfragmented and uncontested version of Hindu India” (410, 406).
  - 3 Or, as David Scott argues, universal suffrage was recommended by the Donoughmore Commission not as a *recognition* of Ceylon’s readiness for democracy, but as a means to *develop* that country’s insufficiently democratic sensibility (in Western terms) (168).
  - 4 Annalukshmi’s mother is prompted to set up introductions to local bachelors not just by the bicycle incident, but also by a letter from her husband announcing his plans to wed Annalukshmi to his Hindu nephew. There are personal and cultural reasons for Louisa’s dismay at this news, but her reaction is also shaped by her Christian bias against Hinduism (*CG* 42) and her wish to save face within her social group (43). She is motivated, therefore, to marry Annalukshmi to a man who shares her religion and social class.
  - 5 It would not be in keeping with Selvadurai’s realism for Balendran to dispute whether his sexuality is a social infraction.
  - 6 Selvadurai has called the novel “post post-colonial” (Merchant) and “a Colonial Novel for a Post-post Colonial age” (“Speech”).
  - 7 When Selvadurai’s first novel, *Funny Boy*, was published in 1994, it “was...read by everyone [in Sri Lanka], from the president on down, creating a forum in which discussion of homosexuality could find a way into the social discourse for the first time” (Smith n.p.). The “national debate” (Salgado 110) that ensued included an attempt in 1995 to repeal an 1883 law that criminalized sex between men and imposed a 12 year jail sentence for offenders. Rather than decriminalize homosexuality, however, the Department of Justice decided to expand the law to include lesbians. See Jayasinghe.
  - 8 I wish to thank the anonymous referee who offered valuable suggestions for revisions to this article.

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