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ARTICLE

The Sinhalese Diaspora: New Directions in Sri Lankan Diasporic Writing

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates a particular sub-section of South Asian literature in English, namely, contemporary diasporic social realism fiction by Sri Lankan authors. It not only explores the little-discussed Sri Lankan Sinhalese diaspora which is usually overshadowed by the more numerous and better known Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, but it also focuses on middle-/upper middle-class migrants, whose migration, assimilation and resettlement encompass a very particular set of issues, especially with relation to their class and background. Middle-/upper middle-class Sinhalese migrants from Sri Lanka are more commonly economic migrants (as opposed to political migrants, refugees or asylum seekers). Sinhalese migrants carry a considerable amount of social capital, but generally seem unable to translate this into the correct and recognised currency of the host country, leading to certain frustrations and subsequent necessary (and occasionally painful) identity negotiations. Using Sri Lankan writing in English (SLWE), this article investigates the struggles of middle-/upper-class, Sinhalese economic migrants who attempt to negotiate their integration in their new host societies at a lower socio-economic level than that from whence they came.

KEYWORDS

Class; diaspora; literature; migration; Sinhalese; Sri Lanka

Introduction

For the past three decades, much research has been carried out on the vigorously flourishing body of Indian writing in English (IWE), and there is no doubt but that the case has been convincingly made for the disproportionately large role the Indian *diasporic* writing community has played in the representation of the country within the global literary arena.¹ The

1. Arnab Chakladar, 'The Postcolonial Bazaar: Marketing/Teaching Indian Literature', in *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (2000), pp. 183–201 [<http://ariel.synergiesprairies.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/3395/3336>, accessed 9 July 2015]; Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001); Deepika Bahri, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (eds), *Alternative Indias. Writing, Nation and Communalism* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2005); Anis Shivani, 'Indo-Anglian Fiction: The New Orientalism', in *Race and Class*, Vol. 47, no. 4 (2006), pp. 1–25; Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Nivedita Majumdar, 'When the East is a Career: The Question of Exoticism in Indian Anglophone Literature', in *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (2008), pp. 1–18; Phukan Atreyee and V.G. Julie Rajan (eds), *South Asia and Its Others: Reading the 'Exotic'* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar's Publishing, 2009); Ana Cristina Mendes, 'Exciting Tales of Exotic Dark India: Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*', in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 45, no. 2 (2010), pp. 275–93; Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments. Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); R.B.H. Goh, 'Narrating "Dark" India in *Londonstani* and *The White Tiger*: Sustaining Identity in the Diaspora', in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 46, no. 2 (2011), pp. 327–44; Suman Gupta, 'Indian "Commercial Fiction" in English. The Publishing Industry

scenario for Sri Lankan writing in English (SLWE) is not dissimilar, inasmuch as its *diasporic* output has also had the lion's share of world attention paid to SLWE, though this literary subculture has netted much less critical global literary attention thus far, being much smaller than its Indian counterpart.

In some ways, the development of SLWE is more aligned with Pakistani writing in English (PWE) than with IWE; both these literary subcultures having had to develop in the wake of the more dominant, established, and extensive repertoire of IWE. Like PWE, the recent flowering of SLWE, particularly fiction writing, was scant before the 1990s.² Also, like PWE writers, SLWE writers are mostly educated in the West—many also live in the West—and they show in their writings an ability to live between East and West literally and intellectually.³ Some writers, like A. Sivanandan and Shyam Selvadurai, have forged their identities and directions in exile.⁴ This has produced a type of post-migratory post-colonial literature which 'fundamentally problematizes the condition of migrancy by deconstructing the binaries of home and the world and linking the global to the post-colonial',⁵ and moreover, begins to challenge conventional understandings of the concept of home, forcing the boundaries of home to become increasingly porous and shifting. For these migrants, home is neither something left behind in South Asia, nor yet something built in the new host country, 'but constituted out of crisscrossing and transnational journeys'⁶ and therefore a constantly negotiated *construct of travel*, rather than of settlement.

To date, studies on SLWE, particularly its diasporic output, have mostly been focused on the Sri Lankan *Tamil* diaspora, mainly as a result of the two decades of civil war and its corresponding violence, displacement and trauma. This article, however, departs from the Tamil diasporic focus, to a case study of two novels placed within the *Sinhalese* diaspora. Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts*, and Ashok Ferrey's *The Professional*, both released in 2013, are novels which take the Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) diasporic identity in significantly new directions, investing the genre with a new type and texture of diasporic identity. Ahmed Gamal identifies the migrant literature of the 1980s and 1990s as endorsing a linear form of *bildungsroman*, 'where the protagonist starts in a romanticised version of the host country and ends in disillusionment in his original home country'.⁷ These twenty-first-century SLWE diasporic novels, however, begin to move away from the previously classic diasporic tropes of the migrants feeling alienated and misunderstood, homesick, nostalgically longing for their country of origin. Neither do the migrants reject their home country wholesale to avidly seek acceptance in the new, Western host country, embracing the host country with the fervour of converts. Instead, in these SLWE Sinhalese

and Youth Culture', in *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVII, no. 5 (2012), pp. 46–53; Krishna Sen and Rituparna Roy, 'Introduction', in Krishna Sen and Rituparna Roy (eds), *Writing India Anew. Indian English Fiction 2000–2010* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); and Lisa Lau and Om Prakash Dwivedi, *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

2. Claire Chambers, 'A Comparative Approach to Pakistani Fiction in English', in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 47, no. 2 (2011), pp. 122–34.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Minoli Salgado, *Writing Sri Lanka. Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place* (London: Routledge, 2007).

5. Ahmed Gamal, 'The Global and the Postcolonial in Post-Migratory Literature', in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 49, no. 5 (2013), p. 598.

6. Fakrul Alam, 'The Mythos of Return and Recent Indian English Diasporic Fiction', in Krishna Sen and Rituparna Roy (eds), *Writing India Anew. Indian English Fiction 2000–2010* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), p. 256.

7. Gamal, 'The Global and the Postcolonial in Post-Migratory Literature', p. 500.

diasporic novels, Selvadurai and Ferrey both depict young, male, middle-/upper middle-class protagonists whose relationships with home and host countries are more complicated, more nuanced, less binary, less melodramatic, and definitely less clear cut.

SLWE may well have built upon and profited by having the foundations laid by IWE, developing rapidly from the assimilation/integration—negotiation/struggle diasporic novels in IWE by the likes of Chitra Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. SLWE diasporic writing grapples with new textures and tropes; Selvadurai in interview with Helen Walsh says that in writing *The Hungry Ghosts*, ‘It was hard to find the language to render Canada. It kept sounding too cutesy, too catering, too much like the kind of immigrant life that people are used to reading about’.⁸ It is possible that standing on the shoulders of giants, so to speak, some diasporic SLWE has been able to leapfrog some stages of development in its literary subculture by borrowing some tropes and consciousness from IWE, and consequently has been able to move considerably beyond depictions of immigrants becoming lost or unmoored because they have lost their Asian values or cultures, as many predecessors—IWE diasporic novels—have discussed in depth.

The Hungry Ghosts and *The Professional* do not depict South Asian migrants in the same vein as say Hari Kunzru’s Arjun Mehta in *Transmission*,⁹ with Arjun’s precarious footing in the United States, nor like Monica Ali’s Bangladeshi migrants in *Brick Lane*,¹⁰ struggling to make a decent life for themselves in a very alien world, and are even less like Kiran Desai’s Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss*,¹¹ an illegal immigrant and part of the invisible community, uneducated, ill-informed, and easily and perpetually exploited. These Sinhalese migrants are not victimised to such an extent, nor are they culture-shocked to the extent of Anita Desai’s Arun from *Fasting, Feasting*,¹² who finds America jarring and disorientating to his Indian sensibilities.

Sri Lankan economic migrants are perhaps a little closer in type to Jhumpa Lahiri’s upper- and middle-class, educated Bengali first and second generation immigrants to the US, such as in *The Namesake* or *The Lowland*,¹³ who tend to be cosmopolitans. Similarly, the new Sri Lankan diasporic protagonists from relatively privileged backgrounds, already relatively Westernised even *before* migration rather than as a consequence of migration, have considerable powers of choice and mobility, and thus always have the option to return to Sri Lanka, and therefore have less of an imperative to ‘succeed’ in the West, financially anyway. They are remarkably free in action and agency, and appear to have many more options than the migrants of previous generations and in more straitened circumstances had. More options, however, bring different tensions and problems, which this paper will investigate, along with the problem of maintaining a certain standing, given their backgrounds.

8. Susan G. Cole, ‘Shyam Selvadurai’s *The Hungry Ghosts*. Shyam Selvadurai reading and in discussion with Helen Walsh’, *Now* (2014) [<https://nowtoronto.com/art-and-books/cover-story/shyam-selvadurais-the-hungry-ghosts/>], accessed 7 Jan 2016.

9. Hari Kunzru, *Transmission* (London: Penguin, 2005).

10. Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Blackswan/Transworld/Random House, 2004).

11. Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006).

12. Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting* (London: Vintage, 2000).

13. Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004); and Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Evolving Diasporas; Evolving Diasporic Identities and Diasporic Writings

Orjuela and Sriskandarajah explain how the Sri Lankan Sinhalese migrants differ from Sri Lankan Tamil migrants; Tamil migrants, who are the numerically larger group of migrants, have mostly experienced or perceived some persecution, discrimination or alienation by the state, which conditions and shapes their diasporic identities.¹⁴ Sinhalese migration by contrast has usually been economic in motivation rather than political, commonly for the purposes of work and/or study, and much less often directly related to the civil war. The Sinhalese identity, which spills over naturally enough into the Sinhalese *diasporic* identity, is quite distinctive:

There is...a sense of long-distance nationalism, formed around the idea of a threatened homeland, an ancient culture that needs to be preserved, and the endangered unity of the sacred (Buddhist) island of Sri Lanka. Many Sinhala diaspora organizations also engage in the struggle to 'safeguard the motherland' against what they conceptualize as 'Tamil terrorism'.... The Sinhalese in Sri Lanka have often been described as 'a majority with a minority complex' constantly fearing the dominance of Tamils who in a regional or global perspective are in majority.¹⁵

It is noteworthy that the Sinhalese diaspora, by this argument at least, defines itself relationally, i.e. to a Sinhalese-perceived Tamil menace or threat to the sanctity of their identities, at home as well as abroad. However ironically, as Orjuela and Sriskandarajah and others have pointed out, for all that the majority Sinhalese may have a minority complex, in actuality Sri Lankan identity has often been muddled and conflated with Sinhalese identity; a troubling confusion/conflation because it renders the racial minority identity less visible and included, which of course is at the root of so much of the racial strife.

Although not as widely studied thus far as the Indian diaspora, the Sri Lankan diaspora is not wholly dissimilar, and indeed, South Asians in the diaspora share many common experiences. Judith Brown was correct in noting that for South Asian diasporic people, South Asia is the constant backdrop in their lives, providing many aspects of meaning and identity, 'often involved in a dense network of local and global connections which make them truly transnational people, at home in several places and responding to opportunities and challenges both local and global, keenly aware of the emerging role of South Asia in a changing world environment'.¹⁶ Discussing the new diaspora versus the old diaspora, Makarand Paranjape notes that the new diaspora has unprecedented access to its motherland, and is not cut off as the old diaspora was, which has in turn changed the negotiation of self-identities by diasporic South Asians: 'Not forced to leave the motherland, these writers have chosen to relocate themselves in the metropolitan centres chiefly for economic reasons'.¹⁷ This element of choice of the new Indian diaspora is very much the theme of the Sinhalese diaspora too, and is quite critical in influencing the diasporic subject's relationship with both the home and host countries. Because their leaving was

14. Camilla Orjuela and Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, 'The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. Warmongers or Peace-Builders?', in Susan Koshy and R. Radhakrishnan (eds), *Transnational South Asians. The Making of a Neo-Diaspora* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 325–44.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Judith M. Brown, *Global South Asians. Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 8.

17. Makarand Paranjape, 'Diaspora and Multiculturalism', in Monika Fludernik (ed.), *Writing across Boundaries. South Asian Diasporas and Homelands* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 231–60.

not forced, Sinhalese migrants often lack the bitter sense of exile, but that is not to say their relationship with Sri Lanka is therefore uncomplicated or any less complex.

Paranjape goes on to argue that by having the power of choice to relocate themselves and leave, the new (Indian) diaspora has a certain anxiety and even guilt toward the motherland, which leads diasporic texts into justifying why the motherland had to be left behind.¹⁸ His argument is that the motherland must therefore be constructed by new diasporic writers in negative terms—violent, dark, confused, hopeless, doomed, etc. Whether or not similarly motivated, it is a common trope of SLWE to juxtapose the country's paradisiac environment (particularly before the civil war) with its subsequent dangers, violence and enmities, 'Sri Lanka as a lost Eden poisoned by its inhabitants'.¹⁹ Romesh Gunsekera's celebrated island paradise *Reef* was set predominantly in the 1960s; Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens* portrayed the nostalgically lovely Sri Lanka of the 1920s, as did Yasmine Gooneratne's *The Sweet and Simple Kind*, depicting the charmed lifestyle of upper-class, pre-independent Ceylon; Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and even Ru Freeman's relatively recent release, *On Sal Mal Lane*, were both set predominantly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, just before the 1983 outbreak of violence.²⁰ Vijay Mishra contends that '[a]ll diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own ways'.²¹ There is no shortage of regretful nostalgia, sense of loss, or depiction of lost idylls in Sri Lankan diaspora novels. The Sri Lankan diaspora's unhappiness seems to stem from regret for a lost innocence, a golden era past, a heyday of the country now left far behind.

Apart from the classic diasporic need to reconcile scenarios of the motherland's past glories with its current, less glamorous, perhaps uglier struggles, Francoise Kral also contends that we need to take into account the sense of 'double belonging' of the diasporic subject,²² or as Rushdie calls it, 'a double unbelonging',²³ adding yet another layer of complication to the diasporic negotiation of identity; 'trapped between two worlds, with one foot on each continent, migrants develop a double identity and somehow gain access, through loss and sometimes trauma, to two different systems and to two radically opposed world pictures'.²⁴

Given the complexity and many variations of the diasporic condition and therefore diasporic attitudes, Monika Fludernik discusses three types of (Indian) diasporic texts: i) the traditional immigration and assimilation story (where immigrants have idealised memories of the home country); ii) the novel of (cultural) exile (where idealisation of home country is exacerbated by failure of assimilation); and iii) the multicultural novel (where the diasporic community is more open and flexible and perhaps even in its second

18. *Ibid.*

19. Ruvani Ranasinha, 'Writing and Reading Sri Lanka: Shifting Politics of Cultural Translation, Consumption, and the Implied Reader', in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 48, no. 1 (2013), p. 32. It would be fascinating to track whether this trope has remained commonplace since the end of the civil war in 2009.

20. Romesh Gunsekera, *Reef* (London: Granta Books, 1994); Shyam Selvadurai, *Cinnamon Gardens* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998); Yasmine Gooneratne, *The Sweet and Simple Kind* (Colombo: Perera Hussein, 2006); Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy* (London: Vintage, 1995); and Ru Freeman, *On Sal Mal Lane* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2013).

21. Vijay Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora. Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.

22. Francoise Kral, 'Shaky Ground and New Territorialities in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri', in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol. 43, no. 1 (2007), pp. 65–76.

23. Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton. A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2012), p. 54.

24. Kral, 'Shaky Ground and New Territorialities in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri', p. 73.

generation).²⁵ In this third kind of diasporic text, the multicultural novel, Fludernik argues that ‘diasporic-ness’ or diasporic identity is no longer necessarily a strong element. However Sri Lankan diasporic novels do not appear to fall neatly into any one of these categories, particularly the two novels chosen for analysis in this paper. Selvadurai’s and Ferrey’s latest releases are distinctively diasporic texts, but because the immigrant protagonists move so freely between Sri Lanka and the country of migration (Canada and the UK respectively), their mobility precludes any need for strong idealisations since return is easily accessible even if not particularly frequent; their assimilation is relatively successful and actually largely—although not wholly—on their own terms as to degree and pace, and while this diasporic community is certainly flexible and open, the diasporic element remains key to their self-definition and self-identity. The Sinhalese protagonists do not battle huge obstacles in the host country, but struggle with lower-profile, lower-key discrimination and stumbling blocks. That said, they seem better equipped than past generations of immigrants to deal with the problems they encounter.

Sri Lankan diasporic writing may differ in tone and texture from Indian and other South Asian diasporic writing for a number of reasons, but being diasporic literature, it faces some similar problems and challenges. Without wanting to rehearse at any great length the issues already well argued in many an article and textbook, it is nevertheless worth mentioning those which still apply, and which still confront the Sinhalese Sri Lankan diasporic author of today as much as they have done other South Asian authors of other races, regions, and eras. There are at least three typical issues arising for Sri Lankan diasporic texts: the problem of the emissary position; the authenticity debate; and the dominance of diasporic texts leading to what William Dalrymple has famously called the tail wagging the dog.²⁶

The emissary position is a fairly straightforward issue which although rather oversimplistic and unsophisticated, continues to haunt ethnic minority writers in general, and is unlikely to go away while there is still a remarkable asymmetry of knowledge between the developed and developing worlds, or Global North and Global South.²⁷ While it is widely agreed by authors (and probably even by readers, in general even if not in particular) that literature (including social realism novels) is neither anthropology nor ethnography, that no character or author should be made to bear the burden of (mis)-representation of their racial, cultural or national groups, and that totalisation and homogenisation are a disservice to all, nevertheless ‘texts operate in worlds where ethnic writings get co-opted as representative of cultural groups’,²⁸ and ‘writers are increasingly scripted as cultural ambassadors’,²⁹ Sri Lankan writers as much as any others. There is, however, a significant emissary role for diasporic writers which is often overlooked in the contentious (and often unproductive) casting of the diasporic writer as representative of his homeland; Amitav

25. Monica Fludernik, ‘Imagined Communities as Imaginary Homelands. The South Asian Diaspora in Fiction’, in Monica Fludernik (ed.), *Writing Across Boundaries. South Asian Diasporas and Homelands* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 261–85.

26. William Dalrymple, ‘The Lost Sub-Continent’, *The Observer* (12 August 2005) [<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/aug/13/fiction.arundhatiroy>, accessed 31 July 2014].

27. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993).

28. Lavina Dhinra Shankar, ‘Not Too Spicy. Exotic Mistresses of Cultural Translation in the Fiction of Chitra Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri’, in Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare (eds), *Other Tongues. Rethinking the Language Debates in India* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 46.

29. Salgado, *Writing Sri Lanka. Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*, p. 11.

Ghosh argued that given that the relationship between homeland and diaspora is largely a relationship lived in the special site of the imagination, diasporic writers therefore play an important role in the creation of this relationship.³⁰

Where the issue of the emissary position is largely to do with audience expectation and the reader regard of the author, the issue of authenticity is a thornier one for authors, particularly diasporic authors who are always more vulnerable to charges of inauthenticity than those writing from within Sri Lanka. Just as Mishra argues that for the Indian in the diaspora, India is a different homeland than for the Indian national,³¹ so too for the Sri Lankan in the diaspora. And so, given that the diaspora is allegedly experiencing the homeland differently from those living in the homeland, the issue of who speaks for the homeland is an ever contentious one, particularly given who is able to make themselves heard on a global arena, when they do speak.

In the case of IWE, Morey and Tickell outlined that there is suspicion of the work of those seen as privileged migrants who are able to cast a cold and critical eye on India and her predicaments, and whose work receives fetishised status in the West because 'Western publishers and critics, versed in a bourgeois, discourse-oriented radicalism, are guilty of setting an agenda wherein the preoccupations of diaspora writing are inflated to occupy the whole of the available market space of writing from India'.³² Ruvani Ranasinha argues a similar point, pointing out that Euro-American reviewers have the power to *confer* authenticity, and that Anglo-American publishing and its subcontinental outposts have tremendous cultural power in influencing academic canons and popular cultural trends, hence making the important point that authenticity itself is not of fixed value, but is a constructed commodity traded by those in power.³³ Given the Orientalising powers of the Anglo-American publishing industry, particularly in the sphere of publishing in English, the definition of the authentic is feared (in some quarters) to be overly favouring the diasporic accounts.

The most authentic writings, nativists claim, are those writing from within Sri Lanka—sometimes referred to as 'resident' writers—but whose writings are seldom accessible outside Sri Lanka, and so largely go unheard on the world stage (such as the works of Nihal de Silva, Ashok Ferrey and Elmo Jayawardena). This equating of location with authenticity is, needless to say, a distorting oversimplification. Be that as it may, diasporic writers are arranged on a sliding scale of authenticity; sometimes, in a positive slant, they are regarded as a 'privileged insider and informant, a visible cultural translator of a sub-continental nation'.³⁴ Romesh Gunasekera, Shyam Selvadurai and Michael Ondaatje, who are of the diaspora but culturally (ac)claimed by Sri Lanka as Sri Lankan writers, fall into this category, and these three authors have long been lionised in SLWE. There are others who can be considered to be part of this same category even if less famous outside a predominantly Sri Lankan readership: Yasmine Gooneratne, Chandani Lokuge and Ambalavaner Sivanandan, just to name a few who have been writing for a while. Ranasinha argues that

30. Amitav Ghosh, 'The Diaspora in Indian Culture', in *Public Culture*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (1989), pp. 73–8, cited in Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (eds), *Alternative Indias. Writing, Nation and Communalism* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2005), p. 75.

31. Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora. Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary*, p. 18.

32. Morey and Tickell, *Alternative Indias. Writing, Nation and Communalism*, p. xxix.

33. Ranasinha, 'Writing and Reading Sri Lanka: Shifting Politics of Cultural Translation, Consumption, and the Implied Reader', pp. 27–39.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

the burgeoning of SLWE and the broadening spectrum of Sri Lankan writers (both home and diasporic) has lessened the burden of representation on diasporic authors.³⁵

That said, even if no longer so burdened with issues of representation and authenticity, not all diasporic SLWE has been welcomed or well-received by Sri Lankan nativists. Critics of diasporic writers typically charge them with 'inauthenticity in cultural representation, with lack of familiarity with vernacular literatures, and with pandering to western readers' orientalist desires'.³⁶ Those most vulnerable to charges of inauthenticity and who seem to most rouse the ire of nativists are '[t]hose who are in a position to represent Sri Lanka to the outside world—foreign journalists and representatives of international organizations—[who] usually have no real understanding of the situation in the country. They fly into the country for a limited time and believe that they can report on the country from within a comfortable and convenient cocoon'.³⁷ This not only raises the spectre of privileged non-residents and ex-nationals selling homeland culture for profit, rendering diasporic literature resonant with metropolitan privilege, bad faith, and inauthenticity, but has also led to dispute over the politics of the canonisation of diasporic literature.³⁸

There is good reason for dispute, because the known canon of SLWE—known, that is, outside Sri Lanka—just like the known canon of IWE, to an 'extraordinary degree...at least at its highest levels...is now almost entirely written by the diaspora.... It is not just that the diaspora tail is wagging the...dog. As far as the A-list is concerned, the diaspora tail is the dog'.³⁹ The resultant tension between resident and migrant writers partly stems from the fact that resident writers have little international exposure, whereas the work of migrant writers has sometimes gained international acclaim, 'inevitably leading to the creation of two distinct, asymmetrical Sri Lankan literary canons and a context of critical reception in which there is little dialogue between the two fields'.⁴⁰ This lack of dialogue is a festering site for further estrangements and perhaps misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

It is hard to deny that the successful diasporic Sri Lankan authors writing in English have had an edge over their resident counterparts:

The position of 'expatriate' literature is dictated by factors informed by its publication and ready availability within the metropolitan centres in which postcolonial studies has its base. Given that Sri Lankan texts written from within the country are almost entirely published locally—with little or no editorial support, poor distribution and a very limited print run—the constitution of 'Sri Lankan' literature outside Sri Lanka is coming to be increasingly dictated by the terms set by 'expatriate' writers, resulting in a canon of writing set apart from the emergent canon in Sri Lanka which looks more to local writers and the work of selected non-residents for its base.⁴¹

35. *Ibid.*

36. Nalini Iyer, 'Embattled Canons. The Place of Diasporic Writing in Indian English Literature', in Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare (eds), *Other Tongues. Rethinking the Language Debates in India* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 3–4.

37. Maryse Jayasuriya, 'Exotic Ruses? Sri Lanka as seen through Romesh Gunasekera's *Reef* and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*', in Phukan Atreyee and V.G. Julie Rajan (eds), *South Asia and Its Others: Reading the 'Exotic'* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar's Publishing, 2009), p. 116.

38. B.P. Giri and Priya Kumar, 'On South Asian Diasporas', in *South Asian Review*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (2011), pp. 11–26.

39. Dalrymple, 'The Lost Sub-Continent'.

40. Salgado, *Writing Sri Lanka. Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*, p. 4.

41. *Ibid.*, p.16.

Additionally, the location of publishing matters and has considerable impact because the authors published abroad actually end up with a better chance of being reviewed not just in the West, but also in the subcontinent.⁴²

The (uneven) dominance of cosmopolitan migrant writers leads, as the nativist argument would have it, to collusion with Western imperialism. Dorothy Figueira points out that post-colonial critics of the Western imperial centres package India in a way which

reflects values and intellectual paradigms esteemed in the West... They see themselves as both creators and products of national identity. They become, in effect, as much culture brokers as any Orientalist or area studies specialist of the third world... they act as gatekeepers of an Indian immigrant imaginary... By emulating the values and prerogatives of the Western academic secular elite, indigenous postcolonial critics construct a product to be consumed by the West for bureaucratic ends and global marketing needs.⁴³

Once again, the discussion on the Indian diaspora holds particularly pertinent and true for other countries in the Indian subcontinent, and particularly for Sri Lanka.

Retaliating against the criticism of inauthenticity of migrant writers and greater authenticity of resident writers, Salgado has critiqued the 'nativist' tendency in Sri Lankan literary circles to rely on a reading of nation as resulting from natively-determined affiliation, which seeks to privilege the local, resident writer, as well as some chosen, culturally authenticated expatriate writers.⁴⁴ She points out that evaluations of authenticity are limited by being largely based on how an author appears to represent the country and its people, thus investing in a project of 'cultural guardianship'. 'The nativist approach is a direct by-product of the nationalist impulse for cultural reclamation',⁴⁵ and by her argument, no less damaging than the Orientalising power of Anglo-American publishing houses to 'cherry-pick' representations which reach large audiences, as well as deliberate authorial collusion with imperialism; all these parties, it would seem, are equally anxious to secure the (cultural) gatekeeper role.

The New Sinhalese Diasporic Protagonist

SLWE diasporic writers are seemingly required to walk a careful tightrope, they are post-migratory, border intellectuals negotiating their relationship with natal country or homeland, within a 'history that precedes and threatens to determine them, and the centred, western canon into which they strive to write themselves'.⁴⁶

Sinhalese migrants to Western countries have so far mostly been studied under the overarching label 'Sri Lankans' and have been largely perceived by their host societies as 'unproblematic' due to their educated, middle-class backgrounds and willingness to adjust.⁴⁷ Both the Selvadurai and Ferrey novels chosen for case study⁴⁸ depict middle-/

42. Ranasinha, 'Writing and Reading Sri Lanka: Shifting Politics of Cultural Translation, Consumption, and the Implied Reader', p. 35.

43. Dorothy M. Figueira, *Otherwise Occupied: Pedagogies of Alterity and the Brahminization of Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 69.

44. Salgado, *Writing Sri Lanka. Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*, pp. 28–9.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

46. Gamal, 'The Global and the Postcolonial in Post-Migratory Literature', p. 597.

47. Orjuela and Sriskandarajah, 'The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. Warmongers or Peace-Builders?', p. 333.

48. It is worth mentioning that Shyam Selvadurai, who is of Tamil and Singhalese parentage, 'left Sri Lanka for Canada with his family in the wake of race riots of 1983' (Salgado, *Writing Sri Lanka. Literature, Resistance and The Politics of Place*, p.110), and that the focus of his previous novels have mostly been on the lives of urban, affluent, upper-class Tamils, and particularly on issues of homosexuality for the Sri Lankan communities. Ashok Ferrey (a pen name) is of

upper middle-class Sinhalese Sri Lankans who may also pass ‘unproblematically’ under the radar of the host country for the most part, causing few ripples in the mainstream fabric of society, but who nevertheless do struggle with identity construction and like many other diasporic South Asians, think of themselves in ‘composite or multiple terms’.⁴⁹ The migrated self, Rushdie tells us, becomes inevitably ‘heterogeneous instead of homogeneous, belonging to more than one place, multiple rather than singular, responding to more than one way of being, more than averagely mixed up’.⁵⁰

More than averagely mixed up indeed is Ashok Ferrey’s protagonist, Chamath, in *The Professional*. Chamath is a 22-year-old Sinhalese who has lived in UK since he was 11, attending boarding school before taking a Mathematics degree from Oxford. After his degree, his father funds the purchase of an apartment which Chamath is instructed to rent out. Chamath, however, is tardy in sprucing up the apartment to the standard required of the rental market. To earn an income, he works in construction along with other illegal immigrants. Although he is still legally resident at this time, Chamath does not have a national insurance number, and so has to work under the legal radar. However Chamath is soon recruited to the black market as a ‘professional companion’ (code name, Norton) in the escort service industry, and as a male prostitute. Chamath is extremely distressed when he receives notification from the Home Office to say he has only 28 days remaining in the UK; but because he was in the UK from before 1972, he is eventually able to ask his MP to appeal, and is duly granted a visa to remain.

Like Chamath, the protagonist of Shyam Selvadurai’s *The Hungry Ghosts*, Shivan is also a young man in his early twenties who as a teenager migrated with his mother and sister to Canada. Shivan is half Sinhalese and half Tamil, but it is his mother’s Sinhalese ancestry and the Ariyasinghe family wealth and social capital that he largely draws upon all his life. His Sinhalese identity and maternal connections give him access to the privileges and protections of the majority race, while his Tamil identity gives him the chance to emigrate to Canada. (Significantly, although his mother suffers for marrying a Tamil, Shivan does not seem disadvantaged at all by his mixed-race descent.) This novel depicts three generations of the dysfunctional Ariyasinghe family, set in the protagonist’s childhood of 1970s Colombo. After migration to Toronto, Shivan learns to express his gay identity in that more permissive society.

Chamath and Shivan, male protagonists of similar age and status, are not negotiating their identities only because they are caught up in the different cultures of East and West, but also because at one level, they are simply young cosmopolitans in a very complex, mobile world, unsure of what they actually want or would find fulfilling. They are not the most sympathetic of protagonists, they are not even the easiest to identify with, but they are the next wave of first-generation South Asian migrants, moving beyond old and easy binaries. They seek authenticity and valid selfhoods in *both* host and home countries, negotiating a third space for their individualities given the confluence of both spheres of influences. In addition, both Chamath and Shivan have fraught family relationships.

Sinhalese descent, educated at Oxford University, UK, and lived in the UK for many years before returning to settle in Colombo. He says he selected a pseudonym which was generic, not definitively identifiable to any particular ethnic group in Sri Lanka.

49. Brown, *Global South Asians*, p. 179.

50. Rushdie, *Joseph Anton. A Memoir*, p. 53.

From privileged backgrounds, Shivan and Chamath stand to lose as well as gain by migration, and perhaps to lose a good deal more than migrants fleeing more desperate circumstances. Coming from relatively well-to-do families, they may struggle more to assimilate in the UK and Canada because they cannot enter Western society at the class level from whence they came in Sri Lanka; which they understand, but perhaps resent. Migrating, they bring with them some of the trappings of the social capital of their class—fluent English, good upbringing, dignity, a sense of their own entitlement, gentlemanly bearing, a courteous, soft-spoken manner for the most part. They realise they need to seek a new belonging, but given their upbringing and sense of their place in society, they want to do so on their own terms, and hence often end up conflicted and frustrated.

The desperation not only to go to the West, but also to remain ‘migrated’ and not be deported, is highlighted right from the start of *The Professional*: ‘I will not go back, he thought defiantly. *I would rather die*’.⁵¹ Chamath’s desperation would be familiar to many middle-/upper middle-class migrants of various nationalities. Ferrey’s novel depicts the shadowy world which less-than-legal migrants find themselves inhabiting reluctantly yet all too easily. In search of work with fair wages and conditions that will provide them with the means and right to remain, they easily become ‘one of those creatures who lived below the grid, in the blue-grey twilight world occupied by illegals’.⁵² Ferrey not only portrays the middle-class immigrants’ genteel desperation for respectability and legality, but also their compulsive agonising over the few available options. When Chamath receives official notice his legal time in the UK is running out, he reasons:

He could continue as a professional, submerged below the grid, living and dying as one of those shadowy individuals of the underworld that exist in any big city.... He could go home and marry the Kandyan princess, submerging himself in yet another more esoteric obscurity. The one honourable option, that of doing a regular decent job in this big city seemed to be the only one unavailable to him.⁵³

The Professional explores a whole range of migrants, illegal, semi-legal, and legal, in a wide variation of circumstances. Jonas, for example, who has a wife and child, distances himself from any possible problems, taking such care to stay below the radar that he does not even allow himself to form friendships with someone in the same boat, like Chamath: ‘Jonas shook his head. “No, man. My life’s way too complicated. You know what I mean?” He embraced him silently, with a pressure so strong it belied the sentiment of his words. Then he was gone’.⁵⁴ European migrants are in much stronger positions: Elena, for example, is able to give citizenship to Stelios (who is in the UK keeping his student visa alive) by marrying him. Highlighting the ever precarious state of the immigrant, at one point Elena says to her husband: “Anyway, you’re not out of the woods yourself, remember. Your citizenship’s not through yet. I can have you sent back at the flick of my hand”’.⁵⁵ Living in the flat below Chamath is Jamila from Trinidad, who is a legal migrant who clings to the rules of the country which protects her: ‘The council paid her benefits, she was in the system, she knew her rights. The book of council rules was her bible, as it was

51. Ashok Ferrey, *The Professional* (Noida, UP: Penguin Random House India, 2013), p. 6. Italics in original.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–1.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

to every legal immigrant'.⁵⁶ However, it is this legal migrant, the envied Jamila, who ends up unhappy enough to take her own life.

That said, for a long while Chamath does indeed earnestly envy Jamila's seemingly lucky lot of being legal, within the 'system', and looked after by the system.

Unlike him she had made the quantum leap into this other civilization, learning its language, becoming adept in its dark arts. He envied her this fluency, this expertise, because he was beginning to realize it was something he would never achieve: he would always be the foreigner at the table, the one who never quite got it right, the one who never knew which fork to use. The one they were all waiting to talk about the moment he left the room.

So why then did he so desperately want to stay? I don't like my choice taken away from me, he thought. I want the luxury of being able to say no without having it said for me.⁵⁷

Chamath is precisely the jealous exile Edward Said identifies: 'Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong'.⁵⁸ In telling Elena and Stelios about his background and country, Chamath reiterates: "I don't think I really fit in, you know?".⁵⁹ There is both pain and pride in not fitting in, a stigmatisation as well as simultaneously a badge of honour. It is perhaps proof of enduring an ordeal, almost as if suffering alienation translates into earning one's right to remain.

Shivan's mind-set and attitude are not dissimilar to Chamath's, despite never having had to deal with the problem of illegality. According to Shivan, he also fits nowhere. He flees Sri Lanka for Toronto, but upon arrival discovers "I cannot bear it here". . . . Rising in me was a great longing to be back in Sri Lanka and also, paradoxically, a revulsion against being there. Those two irreconcilable feelings pressed tight against each other'.⁶⁰ When Shivan's mother objects to his returning to Sri Lanka after his grandmother has a stroke, he rails against her advice.

'Who are you to forbid anything?' I yelled, all the pent-up rage I had felt in the last few years, all my disappointments, pouring out of me. 'Why shouldn't I go back? What is there for me in this shit of a country? I hate being here [in Canada]. Do you know how much I hate it? Have you any idea of the misery I am living in here?'.⁶¹

Like Chamath, Shivan's insistence on his difference and his right to refuse to belong translates into what Edward Said accurately named an 'intransigence', not easily ignored: 'Wilfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision—which you make more unacceptable because you are in fact unwilling to have it accepted'.⁶² In a sense, this could be because once made acceptable, once one's differences are erased, one's identity—which depends on distinctiveness—may cease altogether to exist, and hence the migrant refuses to relinquish his exilic status, even for the prize of assimilation.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–3.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

58. Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), p. 182.

59. Ferrey, *The Professional*, p. 164.

60. Shyam Selvadurai, *The Hungry Ghosts* (New Delhi: Viking-Penguin, 2013), p. 271.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

62. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, p. 182.

Just as Ferrey provides a context of different migrants for the reader to view Chamath against, so too does Selvadurai provide intriguing little glimpses of how each of Shivan's family members fares in Canada, each struggling and surviving differently. Shivan realises his mother, Hema, faces struggles different from those which she encountered in Sri Lanka when he finds his mother deliberately misrepresenting herself to the diasporic Sri Lankan community in Toronto. 'In all the years we had lived in Sri Lanka my mother had borne the burden of her widowhood with dignity and never lied to friends about her marriage or the enmity that divided her and my grandmother. But here in Toronto, her life had taken on an edge of desperation'.⁶³ It is clear that Hema tries very hard to fit into the diasporic Sri Lankan community in Toronto, even falling in with their rigid customs in ways which she would probably have refused to do if she was still in Sri Lanka, just to gain a sense of belonging and community.

Hema also struggles with preserving her dignity on the work front, joining a workforce which does not recognise her social status, abilities, or class:

Why don't you tell this wretched woman the brave truth of how I go out to a job where I have to put up with an ignorant, patronizing supervisor half my age? A woman who thinks Third World people live in trees, but whose grammar and spelling are appalling? You should hear the way she talks to me, as if I am a halfwit. But what can you expect in this country? A bunch of barbarians.⁶⁴

Hema later works as a secretary in a lawyer's office, but also works evening and weekend shifts in a doughnut shop in Bridlewood Mall. Some of these jobs have conditions which only fairly desperate immigrants would tolerate: 'The franchise was owned by an Iranian woman named Azita, who was erratic and constantly changed the demands she made on employees. The only people who stayed working for her were middle aged immigrant women'.⁶⁵ Like Shivan, Hema feels she has to compromise her standing and take a social 'demotion' in Canadian society.

Renu, Shivan's sister, goes through several stages as she attempts to create a new life for herself as an immigrant. At first, Renu is proud of having achieved some Canadian friendships, which proves to her that she is assimilating, and better than the rest of her family. At this stage of her adjustment, she preaches pro-Canadian sentiments to her family: "'After all, Shivan, they took us into this country out of the goodness of their hearts. Are Canadians coming to kill you and burn your house because you are Tamil? Haven't Canadians paid for that grant you got this year to cover your tuition fees?'"⁶⁶ The assertive Renu learns to accept a subordinate place with her peers, at least initially: 'Renu had extolled the co-operative, non-hierarchical nature of the centre, but there was a definite pecking order amongst her friends... My sister strained forward into the conversation, hands gripped together, her usually vivid expression subdued. She was at the bottom'.⁶⁷ But Renu gradually regains her confidence, finds her footing in the new host country, and indignation and defiance replace gratitude and humbleness: "'There is so much work to be done in this racist, parochial country, Shivan", she would say. "Things have to change.

63. Selvadurai, *The Hungry Ghosts*, p. 121.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

66. *Ibid.* p., 111.

67. *Ibid.* p., 113.

Those bloody whites must be forced to take their heels off our throats”⁶⁸ With her excellent grades providing an opportunity for escape, a resurgent Renu dares to condemn her host country: “Yes, Canada is the shits”, she would say. “I am getting the hell out of here.” And she’d wave her arm to encompass not just the house and our mother, but also the country.⁶⁹ Like many other migrants before her, Renu uses scholastic achievement as an escape route and a means towards gaining status, respect, and a firmer foothold.

Shivan himself does not pass through quite the same stages as his older sister in settling down in Canada. Although he manages to negotiate a gay identity, in other ways, he is more resigned to a sense of not-belonging, accepting this rather than fighting or negotiating it, or seeking to escape it as his sister had done. Graduating with an English Literature degree in Canada, Shivan tries looking for a job in Toronto, ‘but...I knew better than to apply for jobs in light construction or with the Parks and Rec department because these jobs, which paid the best, went to white men. As I looked at the other young people taking down contact information, I felt how much I was still an outsider in this country’.⁷⁰ By comparison, Sri Lanka compensates Shivan and invigoratingly restores the dignity which Canada seemed to have eroded him of: ‘Running her (his grandmother’s) business began to give me a feeling of manhood, which I realized I had been denied in Canada because of my race’.⁷¹

Shivan finds ready acceptance and respect on his return visit to Sri Lanka partly because of his race, but also partly because of his family name, his grandmother’s wealth and connections, and a social apparatus and network that provide him with social capital in a way which being a migrant often strips a person of. And this is precisely why the middle-class migrant has a particular set of struggles when migrating to a Western society, because the social capital which is so important to them, which not only forms their identities but actually informs them of their worth, loses its currency, an experience which is shocking and unnerving. The sense of having the rug pulled out from under one’s feet is perhaps also the reason why, to regain footing in such a precarious new terrain, some migrants do have to go through a series of stages as Renu did, first attempting to embrace the host country in order to justify to oneself the traumatic move there, then fighting back against the dents to their injured pride with defiance and even attempted dismissiveness, before finally negotiating some kind of compromise which can be lived with. It is the humiliating process of having been ‘somebody’ in one’s home country, subsequently being reduced to being ‘nobody’ in the host country, and gradually working one’s way back to being at least ‘somebody small’. Shivan and Chamath clutch their badges of not-belonging because not-belonging, in a sense, validates. In an attempt to still be somebody, being anybody—even the perpetual alien/other/outsider anybody—seems better than being nobody at all.

Both the novels contain an important return visit to Sri Lanka; important because on these return visits, the protagonist take stock of how much they have changed, how far they have moved, and what they have therefore become. Shivan initially had a happy return to Sri Lanka. Despite some trepidation just before landing, ‘I felt suddenly like a foreigner about to enter a strange land, this plane the last point of familiarity from which I would be

68. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

ejected into a chaotic, frightening world'.⁷² He feels the combined sense of recognition and yet unfamiliarity, so typically experienced by many a 'returnee', the sense of a reawakening of thoughts which had long lain dormant, of rediscovery: 'Everything about the landscape was familiar and strange at the same time; that odd disjunction of coming home to a place that was not home anymore...as I read the Sinhalese lettering, I felt the delight of rediscovering that other language which had lain submerged within me for half a decade'.⁷³

Despite the happy return, Shivan's feelings for Sri Lanka are nevertheless muddled: the wise Sriyani says to Shivan: "If you don't mind me saying, you misjudged this country, because you are now foreign to it. You wanted poor old Sri Lanka to love and accept the person you have become in Canada. But it cannot".⁷⁴ Selvadurai's novel seems to indicate that the hybrid product which the migrant has become finds very little hope of being loved and accepted in either home or host country—and indeed, *The Hungry Ghosts*, accomplished novel though it is, is unlikely to be noted for its optimism and cheerfulness. That said, much more valuable than sentimentality or stereotype, *The Hungry Ghosts* is bleakly realistic, dispelling, for example, the myth of the prosperity of all migrants to the West: "Stop talking nonsense, Aacho. That family is probably very poor. You have no idea how those people exist in the West, the jobs they do to survive, the cramped apartments they live in, the daily contempt of white people".⁷⁵

Chamath's return to Sri Lanka—taking with him his friends Elena and Stelios—was a much less happy welcome back than Shivan's, right from the outset. He finds his father extremely ill, and himself practically regarded as an outsider; his friends are not invited to stay at his father's house. Chamath shows his friends Kandy and Unawatuna beach, both tourist spots, but does not take them home for a meal, behaving in fact more like a local tourist guide than a local. Chamath's relationship with the UK is as complicated as Shivan's relationship with Canada. In Shivan's case, Selvadurai explains that Shivan is trying for the impossible, namely, to construct his life afresh without the baggage of his history. 'It's a problem that exists at the heart of every white/non-white relationship', he (Selvadurai) declares. 'It's almost like a ménage à trois, something I wrote about when I began my relationship with Andrew (his live-in partner, who is white). You always have to negotiate Sri Lanka in it as if it were a third person, and if you can't, it just doesn't hold. The immigrant usually pushes that down for the sake of the relationship. It's not just a gay thing. I see it in all kinds of relationships'.⁷⁶ Selvadurai accords the home country such a key role. It is as if the migrant's relationship with the home country is not just close and constant, but inescapable, no matter how damaging, a shadow that attends the migrant always.

Ferrey significantly writes of Chamath: 'He well knew the element of fantasy there was, of play-acting, when your life was transposed to another country. It was this fantasy that fuelled the dreams of so many immigrants, as much as economics or the promise of political freedom. And his own English dream was no different. But going back to Sri Lanka even temporarily would mean reverting to reality'.⁷⁷ This quote is extremely telling, and analytical of the migrant's mind-set: why is 'reality' experienced only in the birth country, while experiences

72. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

76. Cole, 'Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts*. Shyam Selvadurai reading and in discussion with Helen Walsh'.

77. Ferrey, *The Professionals*, p. 195.

everywhere else are but a dream? It indicates Ferrey's insight that the migrant judges all subsequent experiences by the yardstick of home country and its memories, so that everything else, all other experiences, all other places, become almost suspended from reality. This attitude may in part also explain how so many middle-/upper middle-class migrants take jobs in Western countries that they would not demean themselves to take in their birth countries—because of this sense of being suspended from reality, of the life abroad somehow being only play-acting, not the real thing, and so it matters less what they have to do to survive.

This suspended reality however, comes with its own pitfalls: 'To live as if everything around you were temporary and perhaps trivial is to fall prey to petulant cynicism as well as to querulous lovelessness'.⁷⁸ Said predicted the existence of Chamath and Shivan more than a dozen years before they were imagined into existence, foretelling the precise *texture* of their struggles, particularly the 'querulous lovelessness' in which Shivan in particular finds himself ensnared. Like Shivan having Sri Lanka as the third party in a relationship, Chamath also makes his choices in the UK with a consciousness of Sri Lanka ever close to his thoughts: 'He thought with a certain weariness of the sinuous curves, the almost Byzantine complexity of his own Asian morality. It was probably the reason he liked to keep his flat bare and raw: to counteract the weight of this burdensome sophistication. It (the Asian code of ethics) was definitely the reason he didn't want to go back home to Sri Lanka'.⁷⁹ Both authors seem to agree that the incessant awareness of Sri Lanka is almost a kind of unhappy weight which the Sinhalese diasporic person carries with him at all times, necessary to his very identity and selfhood, but not always welcome. 'I didn't respond, because what I had to say was obvious. We might be in living in Canada, but we had brought Sri Lanka with us'.⁸⁰

Conclusion

Exile, Said tells us, is a jealous state. It would seem self-exiles are no different. Shivan and Chamath are perennially prickly, desperate to find belonging, yet clutching displacement stubbornly, almost like a comfort blanket. As Said points out, there 'is the sheer fact of isolation and displacement, which produces the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation and community. At this extreme the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments'.⁸¹ The irony of course is that connections and roots are precisely what the migrant longs for, and simultaneously, self-defeatingly, backs away from in the painful process of identity construction. The self-exiled state is one which the middle-/upper middle-class migrant resents and yet fiercely maintains. Said's attention to the narcissistic element is also extremely key—both Shivan and Chamath are very much turned inwards upon themselves, and have a certain indifference to the world beyond themselves. They are intensely wrapped up in the self, deciphering it, understanding it, recording its feelings, adjusting the externalities to accommodate it. Huge amounts of mental space and energy seem devoted to 'navel-gazing'. It is of course an indulgence only the middle/upper middle classes could afford because they are not being hounded by more pressing material, survival concerns.

78. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, p. 183.

79. Ferrey, *The Professionals*, p. 11

80. Selvadurai, *The Hungry Ghosts*, p. 126.

81. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, p. 183.

Given the narcissism, unsurprisingly the migrant ends up acutely lonely, with ‘a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament’.⁸² As Said points out, what the migrant achieves is precisely what he has no wish to share.⁸³ In defence of the unhappy migrant, however, ‘[t]he act of migration...puts into crisis everything about the migrating individual or group, everything about identity and self-hood and culture and belief’,⁸⁴ hence making it difficult for this kind of migrant to settle completely into a community, even a receptive one, not because of the difference others may perceive, but because of the difference the migrant *needs* to retain. There has been talk of ‘diasporic fatigue’, the dismissal of diasporic writing as too narrowly focused on immigrant issues,⁸⁵ but the fact remains that for the migrant, (the) migration is often the key defining event of his or her life, the pivotal event, the starting point and source of so many life-altering experiences. The literature may be fatigued by diasporic focus, but the diasporic subject himself seldom is.

Ferrey’s and Selvadurai’s depictions of the new Sinhalese migrant flag the point that for many relatively privileged migrants and self-exiles, migration, dislocation, resettlement is not merely a process which happens in a few weeks, months, or even years, and then is finished and filed away; re-negotiation of the self as a result of migration is a work in progress for many migrants, seldom concluded, a constant rebalancing act. Even a privileged migrant always has to take into account an ever-changing homeland, a host country which always needs more adaptation and accommodation to it, a shifting set of desires and aspirations within the self which may feel it is never allowed to wholly settle down.

Moreover, seeking home, identity, and belonging involves a whole series of subtle negotiations for class position, with social capital currency varying from place to place and not always transferable. The Shivans and Chamaths of this world find themselves not only literally flying back and forth between home and host countries (with home and host positions increasingly becoming exchanged, confusingly), but also going back and forth in emotional allegiances and memories, pulled and pushed by strong flows of influences from different places with different value systems, codes of ethics, and priorities, forced to maintain a certain fluidity which leaves them perpetually outside their comfort zones; hence their tendency towards querulousness, isolation, and covert hostility by default. These new diasporic protagonists leave us asking Rushdie’s question: ‘[Is] it possible to be—to become *good* at being—not rootless, but multiply rooted? Not to suffer from a loss of roots but to benefit from an excess of them?’⁸⁶

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82. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*. *A Memoir*, p. 72.

85. Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare (eds), *Other Tongues. Rethinking the Language Debates in India* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. xxiii.

86. Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*. *A Memoir*, p. 72. Italics in original.