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# Voices of the Displaced: Diasporic Narratives and the Sri Lankan Civil Conflict

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**ABSTRACT**

Sri Lanka's three-decade civil conflict spread more than a million citizens around the world and left those who stayed to deal with militarisation, land loss and communal suspicion. Ai investigates, in this article, how in four Anglophone novels – Anil's Ghost (2000), written by Michael Ondaatje; Funny Boy (1994), written by Shyam Selvadurai; Island of a Thousand Mirrors (2012) by Nayomi Munaweera, Joined with post-colonial theory (hybridity, "third space"), diaspora studies (trans-local memory, multiscale belonging) and narratology (focalisation, temporal disjunction), the study performs qualitative close reading which is triangulated with historical reports and secondary criticism. Analysis shows three convergent rupture-vectors: spatial, corporeal and temporal – through which exile is experienced. however, the novels diverge in their inflections of sexuality class and ecology. Formal techniques – mosaic montage, alternation between first person chapters, diary metalepsis, and ecological soundscapes – do more than ornament action; they recompense partiality and squares it in a plane. they execute epistemic interventions that undermine monolingual historiography and encourage readers to take perspectives in betwixt-and-between zones. Together, the texts serve as grassroots peace tools that chart the micro movements of sympathy and model new, hybrid futurities that institutional reconciliatory modes miss. It is argued in the article that Sri Lankan diasporic fiction with its preservation of micro-histories and facilitation of imaginative reconstruction of shattered selves provides essential knowledge for scholars of post-conflict societies, policy makers and practitioners concerned by the affect-centred approach to reconciliation.

**KEYWORDS**

Sri Lankan diaspora; displacement; fragmented identity; post-colonial hybridity; trauma narrative; Anglophone fiction; peacebuilding; comparative literary analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

There was a thirty-year civil war in Sri Lanka from July 1983 until it finished in May 2009. More than 70,000 people died and over a million people were forced to leave their homes on and off the island (1). The war was mostly between the Sinhala-Buddhist-led government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It was a lot like what Kaldor calls a "new war"-a long-lasting conflict in which both state and non-state actors target civilians on purpose and use identity politics to keep people mobilised (2). As the front lines moved, whole towns were cleared of people, the coast and border areas were militarised, and minority groups were uprooted many times. South Asia, Europe, and North America all got a lot of refugees, which led to large Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese diasporas. Sri Lanka is still dealing with the effects of militarisation, land theft, and distrust between communities. This makes it a good place to learn about how violence and displacement can break down a sense of self and belonging. This breaking up is not just a sociological issue; it is also deeply felt and is told in both personal memories and creative works. Anil's Ghost, Funny Boy, Island of a Thousand Mirrors, and Mosquito were chosen for this study because they show different parts of the war and how it affected Sri Lankans living in and outside of Sri Lanka. When you read them together, you get a full picture of a country whose people are still trying to figure out their broken identities as the political landscape changes.

Moving is never just a change of location; it also affects language, way of life, and emotional ties. Adamson says that diasporic life is shaped by "politicised identities and transnational practices" that act as a bridge between pain in the home country and opportunities in the host country (3). Anderson's important idea of "imagined community" reminds us that countries are made up of stories that people talk about their history and future as a group. When people are forced to cross lines, new stories come out that contradict, support, or mix older myths. From Toronto to Zürich, Sri Lankan immigrants have set up dense networks of mosques, temples, welfare groups, and political advocacy groups. These have created what Wayland calls "ethnonationalist networks" that can fund insurgencies and push governments at the same time (5). But literature gives us a view that policy studies do not always have how people feel the pull and push of nostalgia, guilt, and aspiration; how memory becomes a battleground between mourning and forgetting; and how a child born in exile turns their parents' grief into a future-focused identity. By focussing on the inside, diasporic fiction raises the psychological issues of being forced to move and invites readers to live in places where belonging is temporary and up for debate.

Comparative studies of Sri Lankan Anglophone writing have shown that fiction can shed light on social and political issues while also changing the way they look. Salgado's important book shows how eight writers "map violence onto place" and make tourist pictures of tropical paradise less safe. More recently, Mukherjee has emphasised that Nayomi Munaweera's books make the post-war home "unhomely," showing how dangerous it is for women to have many loyalties at the same time (7). Orjuela's research on diaspora action shows how Tamils and Sinhalese keep up old grudges against each other while also finding unexpected ways to work together. All of these studies show that Sri Lankan writings are a good place to look at how moving around changes identity. However, most of the research that has been done so far either looks at a single author or only looks at racial politics. A lot of people have written about the push and pull of exile and return, but not as many have looked at how writers of different races, generations, and genders

reflect these themes. This piece fills that gap by comparing four novels that show different fault lines along the diaspora-homeland continuum. These fault lines are religious, sexual, and linguistic, and they make it harder to choose between simple categories like Sinhalese and Tamil or homeland and host-land.

In light of this, the study asks two questions that are linked: How do Ondaatje, Selvadurai, Munaweera, and Tearne write about what it is like to be moved? ii. How do their books show a broken sense of identity through the characters, symbols, and structure of the stories? When I say "fragmented identity," I mean the feeling of living in different, sometimes conflicting, cultural scripts without being able to bring them all together. Frost's idea of "cosmopolitan fragments" is helpful here: Colombo, Sri Lanka's colonial port city, used to have a mixed civil culture that was later destroyed by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism (9). The novels picked show characters who take these pieces and go to new places, like a forensic anthropologist who digs up war graves, a gay Tamil boy in Colombo, two young women who do not speak the same language but are friends, or a painter who runs away to London. By looking at these kinds of figures, we can see how literature remembers displacement while also creating imaginative ways for people to get back together.

It is important to understand how relocation is expressed in literature for three reasons. In the first place, diasporic novels keep small histories alive that might not be in formal records. Dayal tells us that people who live in diaspora have double consciousness because they are always moving between here and there, the past and the present (10). Second, these stories create a "third space" where, according to Bhabha, hybrid identities negotiate new ways of being in charge that go beyond two-sided oppositions (11). Looking at how authors create these kinds of spaces adds to larger discussions about healing after a war, saying that telling stories can be a way to do this. Third, comparing Sri Lankan writers adds variety to studies of South Asian literature, which mostly focus on Indian and Pakistani writers. The article shows that Sri Lankan writing gives complex views on trauma, exile, and belonging that are relevant to other conflict-affected communities around the world by looking at themes that run through different ethnicities and types of writing.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly research on migration has changed from mainly looking at money transfers to a more in-depth study of emotions, memories, and political participation. Baser's comparative study shows how battles in the home country are "transported" but also changed in the diaspora, leading to both staunch nationalism and calls for peace (12). Bush shows that in Sri Lanka, there are cracks within groups (based on class, caste, and gender) that meet with racial fault lines. This makes it harder to think of Tamil or Sinhalese communities as a single unit (13). Collier and Hoeffler's greed-versus-grievance model helps explain why some diasporas support uprisings and others stay out of them (14). These theories shed light on the structural conditions of exile, but they do not always look at the ways that displaced people make sense of rupture through their stories. So, literary criticism is an important addition because it shows how relocation is lived, not just measured.

Identity is not a fixed thing; it is a debate that is shaped by power dynamics. In her book Location of Culture, Bhabha says that hybridity is a place of creative ambivalence where colonial binaries fall apart (15). Grever and van der Vlies apply this idea to teaching history by showing how national stories either support or question ruling identities (16). For Sri Lankans who have left the country, hybridity shows up as code-switching, mixing up foods, and feeling pride and shame at the same time. In literary works, these movements are dramatised by incorporating them into the plot and imagery. For example, Hindu and Catholic elements are mixed in funeral rites, and lovers translate idioms between languages. These kinds of scenes bring to the fore what Hall calls "new ethnicities"-identities that are formed in response to global flows but are rooted in local memories (17). This means that hybridity is not a happy word, but a state that is full of loss and opportunity.

Hybridity can happen through narrative itself. Upstone says that postcolonial novels use roads, borders, and wrecks as metaphors for space to question colonial maps (18). The lagoon, the plantation bungalow, or the London flat are all places in Sri Lankan literature where people try to figure out who they are after being broken up. When a narrator switches between first- and second-person, which means they are no longer connected to a painful memory, Hall's idea that identity is always "a production" hits home. Textual "third spaces" that are hard to close are made by frameworks with multiple voices, like alternating Tamil and Sinhala points of view and polyphonic testimonies. Looking at these kinds of formal tactics shows how literature not only shows diasporic subjectivity but also makes it.

There is a lot of critical interaction with the four books being studied, but it is spread out. Heidemann thinks that Island of a Thousand Mirrors challenges the idea of a female suicide bomber by focussing on structural violence against women (19). As Amarasekera and Pillai show, Sinhalese writers who live in other countries often switch between sadness and cosmopolitan desire. This suggests a theme of being "bound by the sea," which challenges triumphalist nationalism (20). Valančiūnas talks about how Anil's Ghost and Mosquito show haunting as a way to deal with unsolved violence in an ethical way (21). Even though these studies shed light on specific texts, it is still uncommon to see a comparison across race, gender, and narrative style. This piece responds by putting the four novels in conversation with each other and showing how they all deal with displacement in similar ways while still maintaining their own unique styles.

Despite a lot of complaints, there are still two gaps. First, scholars tend to focus on Tamil refugees more than Sinhalese and Muslim refugees' experiences of migration. Vij's theory of global precarity makes us think about how all Sri Lankans, whether they are majority or group, deal with fear (22). Second, a lot of studies focus on readings based on themes and do not look at how story structure, like chapter breaks, focalisation, and temporal loops, shows how identity is broken up. Watkins' idea of "problematic identities" in migrant fiction suggests paying more attention to these kinds of formal clues (23). By looking at both themes and plots together, this study gives a fuller picture of how Sri Lankan diasporic books show the complicated connection between moving and being yourself.

**Table 1 -Selected Novels and Primary Contexts**

| Author & Year | Title | Protagonist(s) | Primary Locale(s) | Conflict Stage Depicted | Central Identity Fault-Line |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Michael Ondaatje (2000) | *Anil's Ghost* | Anil Tissera | Colombo; rural South; excavation sites | Post-1990 counter-insurgency | Professional exile vs. ancestral belonging |
| Shyam Selvadurai (1994) | *Funny Boy* | Arjie Chelvaratnam | Colombo suburb | Pre-1983 escalation | Queer desire vs. Tamil respectability |
| Nayomi Munaweera (2012) | *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* | Yasodhara & Saraswathi | Colombo; Jaffna; U.S. | Full-scale civil war | Sinhalese–Tamil friendship vs. ethno-nationalism |
| Roma Tearne (2007) | *Mosquito* | Theo Samarajeeva | Sri Lanka; London | War's end & aftermath | Artist exile vs. homeland responsibility |

*(Thematic coding developed by author.)*

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This piece mostly looks at things through the lens of postcolonial theory, especially Homi Bhabha's explanation of hybridity and the "third space." Bhabha changes the way we think about culture by seeing it as a place "in-between" things where fixed identities are shook up by imitation, translation, and bargaining (24). He thinks that hybridity is not a good thing, but a place where conquered people can talk about colonialism again, but this time with a difference that makes authority uncomfortable. The four books show how diasporic Sri Lankans live on the edge of things: Anil, who was trained in the US, uses Western forensic science to find family relics; Arjie, in Funny Boy, imagines a gay utopia by changing a colonial boys' school stage; Saraswathi, in Island of a Thousand Mirrors, uses the militarised imagery of LTTE martyrdom; and Theo, in Mosquito, paints London landscapes that break colonial ideals of beauty. When you read these stories through Bhabha's lens, you can see how identities are formed in the midst of Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism, Tamil independence, and global cosmopolitanism. The idea of a "third space" also draws attention to the structure of stories: chapters with more than one voice, gaps in time, and multiple languages can all be seen as ways that texts show hybrid positions. So, postcolonial theory gives us both the words and the steps we need to take to figure out how displacement leads to culture mixing instead of straight assimilation.

Postcolonialism focusses on hybridity, and diaspora studies adds to that by focussing on movement, memory, and multiscalar belonging. Cohen says that a diaspora is a group of people who have real or supposed ties to a home country but also have roots in more than one host country (25). Vertovec adds to this by talking about transnational networks and "diaspora consciousness," which is a way of thinking about

"here" and "there" that is at times contradictory (26). Sri Lankan diasporas make these factors very clear: Tamil refugees ask Western governments to hold war criminals accountable while also building churches and radio stations that bring Indian culture to the edges of European cities. The novels show these kinds of cross-border connections. For example, Ondaatje's Anil is torn between her American licence to practise forensic science and her strong reaction to the Sinhala-Tamil blood on Sri Lankan soil, and Tearne's main character moves back and forth between London studios and the mangrove swamps of her youth. Studies of the diaspora also focus on changes in generations. Hirsch's idea of "post-memory" describes how the second generation gets traumatic places that they have never been to (27). This is shown in Selvadurai's Funny Boy, where Arjie, now an adult, talks about the Black July pogrom from a Canadian point of view, full of inherited memories and survivor guilt. By adding diaspora theory, we can better understand how personal pasts and shared histories across countries are connected over time.

While postcolonial and diaspora frameworks help explain themes, narrative theory shows us how those themes are connected through story, point of view, and language. Bal says that the meaning of a story comes from how fabula (events), story (order), and text (discourse) work together (28). In Mosquito, for example, the broken timeline shows how Theo's identity is broken, and in Island of a Thousand Mirrors, the folktales that are woven into the story act as commentary on shared myths. Genette's idea of focalisation is also relevant: Arjie's limited, childlike view in the early chapters of Funny Boy delays the reveal of ethnic violence, just like readers from other countries who understand homeland conflict too late (29). Paying attention to maps, epigraphs, and chapter epigrams in the background can show how writers place Sri Lankan stories in the larger world of literature. Lastly, trauma narratology lets us know about "speechless fright" and "temporal looping" structures that hold terrible crimes (30). The study will look at not only what the novels say about displacement but also how their structure as texts makes readers feel it visually. It will do this by combining narrative theory with postcolonial and diaspora ideas.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative close reading is used in the study. This is a method that emphasises paying close attention to language texture, metaphor, and structural decisions. The four-novel corpus is purposeful rather than complete. Each one has been praised by critics and shows a different community position: Anil's Ghost is about a Sinhalese Catholic-Buddhist hybridity, Funny Boy is about a Tamil middle-class metropolis, Island of a Thousand Mirrors is about dual Sinhalese–Tamil viewpoints, and Mosquito is about an exiled artist who comes back to Sri Lanka. In terms of time, they cover the war's start in 1983, its peak in the 1990s, its end in the 2000s, and its fallout, which lets us compare them across different time periods. Including authors from Canada, the US, and Great Britain guarantees that the book has views from people living outside of Sri Lanka. Texts were read over and over again, and parts that show crossing borders, changing languages, memory flashbacks, and body reactions to violence were coded. NVivo software helped with the initial thematic clustering, but the final interpretation depended on reading the texts again by hand to keep track of tone, irony, and connotative layers that software cannot pick up.

There are two levels of comparison. First, intra-textual analysis shows how each book handles displacement through plot devices like journey themes, letters, and migrations, as well as identity fragmentation through inner monologues, code-switching, or creepy symbols like mirrors, ghosts, and mosquitoes. Second, putting texts next to each other brings out similarities and differences, such as nostalgia, survivor guilt, and physical vulnerability; queer subjectivity; and gendered militarisation. Findings are checked against secondary review, interviews with the author, and historical records to avoid using anecdotes. For example, Arjie's account of the riots in 1983 is compared to actual accounts put together by the International Committee of Jurists to see how true they are and how much they have been changed. This kind of triangulation puts literary representation in the context of social and political patterns without turning art into mere reporting.

The analysis codebook is summed up in Table 2. Codes were found by drawing conclusions from theories (like hybridity and third space) and by drawing conclusions from patterns that appeared in the text (like oceanic images and forensic epistemology). Two study assistants coded 15% of the passages separately; their agreement was 0.82 Cohen's kappa, which means they were very reliable. Disputes were settled by talking about them and improving the meanings of the codes. Analytical choices were written down in memos so they could be checked.

**Table 2 -Analytical Code-Book**

| Thematic Code | Definition | Sample Passage | Theoretical Anchor |
|---|---|---|---|
| HYBRID-BODY | Moments where a character's body symbolises mixed cultural lineage | "Anil's passport declared her Sri Lankan-born, American-educated bones expert." | Bhabha (24) |
| THIRD SPACE-SETTING | Physical sites where ethnic binaries blur | Arjie's "Queen Victoria Academy" stage | Bhabha (24) |
| POST-MEMORY | Second-generation recollection of ancestral trauma | Theo's dreams of wartime lagoon | Hirsch (27) |
| FORENSIC-EPISTEMOLOGY | Use of scientific investigation to recover suppressed truths | Anil measuring skull sutures | Bal (28) |
| OCEANIC-IMAGERY | Water metaphors signalling fluid identity | "Bound by the sea" refrain in Munaweera | Amarasekera & Pillai (20) |

Even though there are no people involved in literary study, ethical reflection is still very important. As a Sinhalese heritage researcher who went to school in Europe, I am in a unique "shuttle position" between my home country and the people who live there now. When I read Tamil exile stories, I have to go through language barriers and moral frames that I have always held. To reduce bias, I asked Tamil-speaking

coworkers to help me with peer-debriefing and emphasised authorial purpose when interviews made that possible. Also, recognising the unfair parts of global publishing-for example, Sinhalese writers can usually get into English-speaking markets more easily than Tamil writers-helps us see gaps in the collection. Because of this, findings are given as possible meanings, not firm judgements.

Because the study was informal, it can not be said that the results can be applied to other situations. Leaving out works written in Sinhala and Tamil could lead to Anglophone bias, but focussing on English lets us look at how colonial language shapes postcolonial identity. Fiction books written in prose were chosen. Fiction novels written in poetry, drama, or real life were not chosen. It also does not talk about how readers responded, which is something that needs more research. In spite of these problems, close reading gives detailed information that can help bigger discussions about writing about displacement. By following small changes in narratives like syntax and sensory themes, it shows hidden information about diasporic life that surveys or archive studies might miss.

## V. ANALYSIS

### A. Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*

Anil Tissera, the main character in Ondaatje's book, shows what Vertovec calls "diaspora consciousness"-living in both the present in the host country and the past in the home country (26). After living abroad for 15 years, she is now back in Sri Lanka on a U.N.-backed human rights mission to look into killings that did not follow the law. In the first few pages of the book, she is comparing how comfortable she is with Western air travel to how overwhelmed she is with kerosene smells, motor horns and monsoon humidity when she arrives in Colombo. This shows an instant shift in how she sees things. This dual vision tells a story about displacement: Anil sees with the detached view of an immigrant, but she feels deeply connected to the land when it "floods back into her skin." Bhabha's idea of a third space makes the constructive conflict clear: Anil is neither an outsider nor an insider; her authority comes from being able to understand both global forensic epistemology and Sri Lankan culture codes (24). A skeleton called "Sailor" was found at an undisclosed government site and used as a plot device. The skeleton literally represents hybridity, since bones are universal data but have wound marks that are special to each culture. So, Ondaatje shows displacement not as a lack of a place to live, but as a way of looking at things that reveals hidden violence and makes the viewer feel like they do not fit.

Anil's Ghost is told through a patchwork of flashbacks, sidetracks, and shifting points of view. Bal calls it a text whose discourse rejects linear causality (28). In the present tense, fieldwork in the south of the 1990s is broken up by chapters about Anil's swimming lessons as a child in Colombo. Similarly, descriptions of ancient rock frescoes lead to medical classes in London. This collage breaks up identities; readers feel dislocated in time, just like Anil does as his mind goes back and forth between foreign knowledge and remembered closeness. Genette's idea of analepsis describes how retroactive insertions give context but also break motion (29). Traumatological theory also says that violent past does not tell itself clearly; instead, it comes back as a flash or image later on (30). So, the way the book is put together shows how Sri Lanka is still dealing with the effects of its civil wartime becomes fragmented and refuses to end. By making readers put together different pieces, Ondaatje asks them to take an ethical role in the work of

reconstructing memories. This makes a connection to the work of repairing selves that have been split by war and migration.

Hybridity shows up in both characters and artefacts, like stone Buddhas that were beheaded by rebels, medical scalpels that were used as digging tools, and masks that Ananda carved to protect people. Bhabha's "third space" is summed up by the mask Ananda carves for Sailor's face to give nameless bodies a human face again. This space combines Buddhist funeral art with international forensic investigation (24). This mix of different cultures questions nationalist categories: the dead man could be a Tamil rebel, a Sinhala dissident, or a Muslim civilian; the mask refuses to be labelled by race and instead insists on our shared humanity. Vij's claim that global precarity is lived at the intersection of labour, culture, and violence fits well with the idea of including craft processes because they show how fragile intangible heritage is in a world that is becoming more militarised. For users from different places, these kinds of artefacts make the tension between preserving and destroying that is typical of exilic memory work real.

**B. Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy***

Arjie Chelvaratnam, unlike Anil, never leaves Sri Lanka during the time frame of the story. However, he lives in a state of internal displacement long before racial violence forces his family to leave the country. Selvadurai tells the story of Arjie's growing gay desire in a place where both Tamil respectability and Sinhala majority norms make homosexuality unthinkable. So, diasporic fracturing starts in the body. For example, Arjie sees his gender presentation as a "funny" mismatch that makes him feel out of place in his family and in society. Marcus says that the control of sexuality by men and the use of ethnic nationalism by police forces are connected (7). Selvadurai makes this more dramatic by setting up rumours of Tamil militancy around Arjie's connection with Sinhalese school prefect Shehan. Their private relationship becomes tangled up with racialised surveillance. So, displacement is not only being sent to a different place but also being sent away from heteronormative Tamil morality. The book looks ahead to a time after memories: Arjie tells the story from Toronto, showing how second-generation diasporas use physical memories of life in Colombo before the war to create new, gay identities abroad (27).

Selvadurai uses a first-person child narrator who does not fully understand the horrors of ethnic riots until the second-to-last chapter, "Riot Journal." This is similar to Caruth's idea that trauma happens later in life (30). Early episodes, like family weddings, cricket games, and Bollywood dreams, seem innocent and fun. But as the story goes on, signs of a coming split start to show up, like school segregation, anti-Tamil slurs, and later curfews. When Black July starts, the story quickly changes to diary form, condensing 48 hours of chaos into short notes. This change in style emphasises how fragmented his identity is: language itself breaks down when it is under severe stress. The notebook is similar to Anil's skeletal evidence in that they are both collections of evidence of violence that official histories would try to erase. When styles like Bildungsroman, queer romance, and political chronicle are put next to each other, it creates a new kind of hybridity that challenges literary classification in the same way that character's challenge racial and sexual categories.

**Table 3 -Key Vectors of Displacement in *Anil's Ghost* and *Funny Boy***

| Vector | *Anil's Ghost* | *Funny Boy* | Convergence |
|---|---|---|---|
| Geographic Mobility | Returnee from diaspora to homeland | Prospective exile, narrated from diaspora retrospectively | Both negotiate insider/outsider lens |
| Identity Fault-Line | Professional cosmopolitan vs. Sinhala–Tamil violence | Queer sexuality vs. Tamil respectability/Sinhala hegemony | Bodies as contested sites |
| Narrative Form | Fragmented montage, multiple focalisations | Child-narrator linearity disrupted by diary | Formal breaks signal trauma |
| Material Metaphor | Forensic skeleton, ritual mask | School play stage, cricket field | Everyday spaces re-inscribed by conflict |
| Temporal Scope | Mid-1990s counter-insurgency | 1970s-1983 riot escalation | Diachronic view of war's life-cycle |

By comparing the two books, we can see that ondaatje's themes of professional cosmopolitanism and forensic witnessing and Selvadurai's themes of queer sexuality and ethnic marginalisation, displacement and identity fragmentation are expressed along intersecting paths. But in both works, the body is seen as a collage of different meanings: Sailor's bones show state terror, and Arjie's body shows heteronormative police work. The forms of the stories add to the body-related themes. For example, Ondaatje's fragment montage sounds like skeletons that have been cut up, and Selvadurai's switch to a diary style sound like being shocked in the body. In addition, both books use cultural objects like masks and stage props to create third places where rigid categories fall apart. It is important to note that neither author offers a simple solution. Anil's Ghost ends with a vague sense of hope as Ananda fixes Buddha's eyes, while Funny Boy ends with the character about to leave the country. These conflicting ends support Bush's claim that identities formed after a war are still unstable and uncertain (13). So, the books do important work with memory: they do not accept nationalist closure; instead, they demand that pieces be held in tension instead of being forced together.

### C. Nayomi Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*

In Munaweera's first book, Yasodhara Rajasinghe, a Sinhala Buddhist girl from Colombo, and Saraswathi Sinnathurai, a Tamil Hindu schoolgirl from war-torn Jaffna, each write their own first-person diaries. The word "mirror" in the title has more than one meaning. The island is a reflective surface where each community sees a distorted picture of the other; the different chapters are like parallel coming-of-age stories whose paths eventually meet, showing how inevitable it is for people of different ethnicities to clash. Changing the storyline every 15 to 20 pages is like Bhabha's "in-between space" in the real world: readers are thrown between language, landscape, and ideology, and they cannot settle into a single ethnonational lens (24). Mirrors are also a sign of self-examination, as both narrators deal with chauvinism they have picked up from family stories. For example, Yasodhara's grandma tells the Sinhala-Buddhist origin story in which a lion-flag stands for power, and Saraswathi's aunt talks about the glory of the Chola era in Tamil. So,

before any physical exile happens, the novel sets the stage for displacement as a mirror fracture, where each side sees the other through the fine lines of half-remembered tales. This kind of structural mirroring supports Mukherjee's claim that a home is "unhomely" when spectral bad guys in the form of stories enter private living spaces (7).

Saraswathi was raped by Sinhala troops, which is the first visceral example of displacement in the corpus. It shows a body violently thrown out of normal girlhood and forced to join tiger militancy. Heidemann thinks that Saraswathi's story shows how necropolitical gender norms make the female suicide bomber a double-edged sword: she is both a victim and a tool (19). In the story, joining the LTTE is not seen as an ideological awakening, but as being forced to leave her family's culture of honour; the training camp in the forest becomes a new home where order makes her feel like she belongs. Munaweera's writing emphasises the body-bruises, menstrual blood timed to military drills-to make the point that relocation is felt in the body. Vij's idea of the "subject of precarity" is shown well by Saraswathi's social death at the time of her rape, which leads to a search for agency in sacrifice and an extreme negotiation of bare life. The language used here is very different from Ondaatje's metaphorical subtlety. Sentences are cut down, and Tamil command words are mixed in with the English, creating a broken linguistic texture that looks like a body breaking. As a result, both syntax and story are broken up for the reader, which supports the article's main idea that narrative form breaks up identity.

For Yasodhara, displacement happens across oceans: her family moves to New York when anti-Tamil pogroms get worse. Amarasekera and Pillai say that Sri Lankan migrant writing is "bound by the sea," using the Indian Ocean as both a womb and a moat over and over again (20). In a continuation of this theme, Munaweera describes the Atlantic as strange, "grey and muscle-cold," rejecting the tropical closeness that Yasodhara connects with Galle Face waves. Diaspora consciousness shows up in code-switching phone calls and nostalgic food (crab curry recipes), but it also shows up in survivor guilt that gets worse when Yasodhara learns that her Tamil friend Shiva has gone missing. Post-memory only works with one generation at a time. Her daughter Samudra (ocean), who was named to remember and transcend, is the embodiment of a mixed future. So, the oceanic vocabulary does two things: it mourns loss and points the way towards a fluid decomposition of self in diaspora. The speed of time in the story quickens in these chapters, condensing years into paragraphs to show how quickly refugees have to change to life in suburban America.

Both stories come together violently when Saraswathi blows herself up on a Colombo bus, killing Lanka, Yasodhara's artsy sister. The idea of the island as a mirror is taken literally in this structural convergence: each character's path mirrors and breaks up the others. The explosion scene is told from two different points of view: the bomber's trancelike anticipation and Yasodhara's grief afterward. This forces readers to experience an emotional range that is not possible in a single-perspective war story. Watkins says that these kinds of "problematic identities" do not easily fit together, which is why Munaweera does not want to let go (23). At the end of the book, Yasodhara throws Lanka's ashes into the Hudson River and thinks about a future where her mixed-race daughter does not have to deal with Sinhala or Tamil exclusivity. Reconciliation is still an ideal that is based on next-generation hybridity rather than legal justice or peace-

accord language. So, the result agrees with postcolonial criticisms that real healing after a war must come from fixing small relationships, not from state narratives told from the top down.

**D. Roma Tearne's *Mosquito***

Tearne, a Sri Lankan Burgher who moved to Britain, writes about Theo Samarajeeva as an upper-class Sinhalese writer who goes back to the lagoon where he grew up after the death of his wife (48). As the civil war gets worse, he has to leave his home with his teenage Tamil neighbour Nulani in order to finish writing a historical book about a Tamil queen in the 17th century. There are two kinds of displacement here: the physical exile back to Britain and the aesthetic exile from the creative mind, since war makes historical romance pointless. Valančiūnas reads Mosquito through the lens of hauntology: lagoons, monsoon rain, and the buzzing of mosquitoes are all spectral memories of Ceylon's once-cosmopolitan past (21). Theo's writing style combines sad nostalgia with postcolonial disillusionment, putting broken identities within a long artistic tradition. He teaches Nulani European oil painting skills while using pigments ground from native plants. In this way, hybridity is built into art, which supports Bhabha's claim that the third place can be "the cutting edge of translation" (24).

Mosquito uses a frame narrative to structure its story. Ten years later, an older Theo talks about what happened from his studio in London. This analeptic arrangement is similar to Ondaatje's mosaic, but it has an added mise-en-abyme: the unfinished book about the Tamil queen is like Nulani's failed artistic apprenticeship. Bal's idea of story/discourse disjunction makes it clear how gaps in time create tension and theme resonance (28). Each chapter starts with a dated excerpt from a diary, creating a timeline that shows how the war is getting worse while focussing on how each person is feeling. The mosquito theme comes up again and again whenever characters try to get close, and its whine is a sound that warns of an imminent rupture. This use of multiple media to represent the same idea connects physical weakness to political instability. Sometimes the first-person narrative voice changes to the second-person voice ("you dreamed of the lagoon"). This creates what Genette calls metalepsis, a border breach that involves the reader's conscience (29). In terms of diaspora studies, the text acts as a transnational relay: memories of the lagoon in Sri Lanka make their way into art spaces in London, shaking up the city's comfortable routine.

Some people say Tearne made Nulani out to be a rescue object, a Tamil lady in distress who was saved by Sinhalese paternalism (49). But a closer look shows that Nulani was up to no good. After he moves to Britain, he becomes a famous painter whose pictures of dead elephants criticise both Sinhala and Tamil violence. Rashmi Varma's idea that postcolonial towns hold palimpsests of hidden histories is similar to her show called "Country of Lost Stories." So, gendered displacement gives people power: Nulani's exile gives her a chance to turn pain into art, turning the passive cliché on its head. It is important to note that her paintings are bought by both Sinhala collectors and Tamils who have left Sri Lanka to help others. This points to the possibility of aesthetic third spaces where business transactions replace military combat. Vij's idea of global precarity comes up again: Nulani's success depends on unstable art markets and NGO funding, which shows that there is insecurity even where it seems like there is freedom (22). Tearne's writing is full of images from nature, and birdsong vocabulary (like koha and tailorbirds) goes with important plot points. This kind of soundscape becomes a way for people who have been moved to

remember things. For example, Theo in London tries hard to hear red-throated divers as sonic substitutes for lagoon kites. This fits with Porteous and Smith's idea of domicidal trauma, which means the destruction of home settings (45). Language also moves around. For example, Sinhalese and Tamil words appear in Queen's English sentences that are not translated, forcing readers to live in a language hybridity. O'Riley calls this mixing of codes "postcolonial haunting," which means that indigenous words stay in modern speech like ghosts (12).

**Table 4 -Displacement and Identity Matrix in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* vs. *Mosquito***

| **Dimension** | ***Island of a Thousand Mirrors*** | ***Mosquito*** | **Intersections / Divergences** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative Voices | Dual 1st-person (Sinhala/Tamil) | Retrospective 1st-person + diary inserts | Both multi-temporal; Tearne adds frame story |
| Displacement Mechanism | Pogrom → U.S. asylum; suicide bombing backlash | War threats → UK asylum; artistic opportunity | Shared Atlantic resettlement; different class vectors |
| Identity Fragmentation | Ethno-religious + gender trauma | Artistic vocation + survivor guilt | Both deploy ocean imagery to signal fluid identity |
| Formal Devices | Alternating chapters, folktale epigraphs | Diary dates, meta-novel fragments | Fragmentation as narrative strategy |
| Hope Modality | Hybrid child (Samudra) | Hybrid art (Nulani's paintings) | Future located in aesthetic/offspring hybridity |

When read together, Munaweera and Tearne show a wider range of displacements, from bodily harm to eco-aesthetic desire. In Island of a Thousand Mirrors, gendered aggression is emphasised, while in Mosquito, environmental nostalgia is emphasised. Still, both books are about the idea that pieces-like mixed-race children or blend art-can start to form possible futures. Their female leads, Saraswathi and Nulani, show two very different ways of dealing with violence: destroying oneself and making something new. This difference strengthens Heidemann's claim that Sri Lankan women after the war switch between martyrdom and protest (19). Formally, both texts break up chronology, which is in line with Caruth's idea that stress changes the way linear memories work (30). Lastly, Ondaatje and Selvadurai describe the start of displacement, while Munaweera and Tearne picture its long-term effects on time, showing that fragmentation can lead to unexpected connections across oceans. The four novels back up Bhabha's claim that "the articulation of cultural difference is what produces identity" (24). Displacement does not just break down identity; it also makes it possible for it to be re-articulated in new, constantly changing mixed forms.

## VI. DISCUSSION

In these four books, displacement is shown through three types of breaks: physical (moving across borders), corporeal (violence or desire etched on the body), and temporal (memory that does not follow a straight line). Characters move between concentric rings of space, from villages to capital cities and from islands to metropolises. This is similar to what Smith and Stares describe as "multi-scalar diasporic engagement" (59). Anil's Ghost shows how trauma is etched into bone, Island of a Thousand Mirrors shows how trauma is etched into skin, Funny Boy shows how traumatised teens are sexually, and Mosquito shows how traumatised people are by the breeze. When it comes to time, story fragmentation shows what Caruth calls trauma's rejection of chronological order (30). These kinds of similarities show that even though people's racial, gender, or social backgrounds are different, some aspects of exile are the same. This creates what Tint et al. call "diasporic dialogue," which helps readers see shared emotions beneath political differences (60). Based on this pattern, it seems that relocation in Sri Lankan writing is not a one-time event but rather an ontological state-a constant readiness to move, mourn, and translate.

In important ways, the books are also different. Selvadurai puts gay desire front and centre, taking diaspora studies beyond the narratives of heteronormativity in families. Butler says that sexuality can be a place where people are forced to leave hegemonic family relationships. His image fits with this idea. As an example, Tearne talks about biological displacement, such as the loss of bird habitats, medicinal plants, and lagoons. This is similar to current discussions about climate migration. Nixon talked about "slow violence," which is natural damage that forces people to move without making headlines. Class also shapes paths: Anil's cosmopolitan skills allow him to move around easily, while Saraswathi's rural poverty leads her to become a soldier, and Theo's advanced English skills make the refugee process easier. So, identity fracturing can not just be explained by race; gender, sexuality, class, and ecoculture are also important factors that affect diasporic experience. This subtlety makes it harder to study diasporas as uniform groups, which is similar to Koinova's warning that "conflict-generated diasporas are internally variegated" (63).

Form is important, not just idea. Not only are fragmented montage, diary metalepsis, dual narration, and environmental soundscapes nice to look at, but they also test the way we think about history. Bush says that government stories about Sri Lanka do not talk about violence between groups (13). Literary fragmentation shows different voices and counters this erasure. Bal's narrative theory explains how the order of speech affects how readers think (28): jumping from Colombo 1974 to New York 1998 forces readers to piece together meaning, reenacting the migrant's own bricolage identity. In this way, novels teach readers what Hall calls "new ethnicities"-identities that are made through negotiation rather than inheritance (17). When Island changes between Sinhala and Tamil epigraphs, it forces readers to switch between languages, creating a multilingual world. It crosses media lines when Mosquito adds sketches of birds that live in lagoons, which is similar to Bhabha's idea of the "cutting edge of translation" (24). As a result, narrative strategy not only shows shifting but also does it, which can make reading habits that are one-lingual or linear uncomfortable.

How do these books add to the conversation about building peace? Lederach stresses the value of "elicitative" methods that use cultural materials from the area (64). Literature maps out small acts of unity that are not seen in formal peace talks, like sharing rice after dark or carving a mask for a body that no one knows about. In Amarasingam's ethnography, diaspora activism shifts between hawkish lobbying and humanitarian help (42); fiction gives these actors a human side and shows how their different goals affect them. For example, Walton shows that calling wars "genocide" makes some diaspora campaigns more acceptable (65). Our books, on the other hand, do not use simple frames and show how different people are responsible for different things. In this way, they create a mental space where people from Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslim, and Burgher backgrounds can face their shared vulnerability. This creates an emotional base for what Rothman calls "identity-based reconciliation" (66). So, literature is a low-cost, wide-reaching tool for peace that policymakers have not used much.

**Table 5 -Contribution of Each Novel to Key Scholarly Debates**

| **Scholarly Debate** | ***Anil's Ghost*** | ***Funny Boy*** | ***Island…*** | ***Mosquito*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trauma & Memory | Forensic montage | Child-diary belatedness | Dual blast narration | Frame analepsis |
| Gender & War | Female professional witness | Queer masculinities | Rape & militancy | Young female artist |
| Diaspora Politics | Returnee ethics | Prospective exile | US resettlement & survivor guilt | UK asylum & art market |
| Ecological Loss | Cave fresco damage | Urban pollution hints | Ocean as border | Lagoon ecology foregrounded |
| Peace-building Potential | Mixed-ethnic testimonies | Inter-school friendship | Hybrid child symbol | Cross-ethnic art exchange |

*(Author's synthesis.)*

## VII. CONCLUSION

The point of the piece was to look at how four Sri Lankan diasporic novels show identity loss and moving around. We showed that each work talks about different but related ways of moving around in space, writing on the body, and breaking time through postcolonial, diaspora, and narrative lenses. In Anil's Ghost, displacement is seen as a return for reasons unknown, in Funny Boy, as a queer domestic exile, in Island of a Thousand Mirrors as gendered militarism and transoceanic flight, and in Mosquito as an ecological-artistic desire. Some ways of telling stories, like mosaic montage, diary rupture, dual mirror chapters, and meta-novel frames, use fragmentation to get readers involved in the work of putting things back together again. Convergences point to a shared ontological state of Sri Lankan identity: it is always moving and trading pieces. Divergences show how sexuality, class, and the environment make racial stories

more complicated. The books as a whole broaden people's ideas about how to build peace by showing small groups working together and different futures.

The comparison shows how important it is to look at literature from different ethnic groups and genres when studying literature from small nations that are often separated by community. Through studying the diaspora, we learn more about how non-economic factors, such as queer intimacy and ecological nostalgia, shape cross-border involvement. For people who work to promote peace and reconciliation, fiction gives them qualitative information about emotional landscapes that polls don't. Including literary works in the lessons of Sri Lankan groups that are looking for the truth or in youth programs for people living abroad could help people understand each other better. International funders who give money to arts-based peace projects might think about how narrative hybridisation is similar to community hybridity and support projects that let Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim artists work together to make art. Policymakers should understand that limiting multilingual expression, like banning renditions of the Tamil anthem (52) hurts the third places that literature so skilfully creates.

In the future, researchers may look at stories written in Sinhala and Tamil as well, which would allow them to compare three different language environments. Comparative work with diasporic writings from Rwanda, Bosnia, or Palestine could see if the patterns of stories found are part of a larger "post-conflict diasporic poetics." Reader-response projects could look into how young people from Sri Lanka who have left the country understand these books: Does Funny Boy promote gay rights? Should people of different ethnicities talk to each other? Digital methods in the humanities, like topic modelling and stylometry, can help with close reading by mapping linguistic markers of trauma and hybridity across a bigger corpus. Finally, literature experts, psychologists, and people who work to build peace could work together to test bibliotherapy interventions and see if reading these books actually makes it easier for people from different groups to understand each other in communities that are divided.

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