

Fritz Thyssen Stiftung





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ORGANISING TEAM

Prof. Dr. Stefan Horlacher Dr. Birte Heidemann-Malreddy

and

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THE *art* OF NEW ALTERNATIVES?

Nation-Building and the Creation of a >New Community< in Contemporary Sri Lankan Art

ith its long pre-colonial Sinhalese and Tamil history in addition to its unique legacy of successive colonisation by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, Sri Lanka can be seen as an exemplary test case for postcolonial societies and nations but also for theories and models of hybridity, syncretism, multiculturalism, community and nation-building; a model case for dealing with difference and diversity, religions and ethnicities, traditions and histories as well as ideologies and political doctrines in a highly traditional and stratified society against the backdrop of a convoluted past.

This conference sets out to ask for new, different and more creative solutions of what multiethnic and multireligious life in Sri Lanka might look like; to ask for concepts of community and nation-building, of negotiation, hybridity and vunity-in-difference which transcend political rivalries, ethnic and religious rifts as well as economic dependencies, and to offer alternatives to the present (and historical) deadlock.

For these reasons, the conference adopts a strong cultural studies perspective which includes questions stemming from sociology, social anthropology/ethnography, postcolonial theory and the philosophy of community. By understanding culture »as a terrain of struggle wherein the political fabrication of territories and the articulation of collective life are contested and negotiated« (B. Korf), the conceptual frame of the conference seeks to transcend the narrow limits of the political and sociological sphere through a strong focus on Sri Lanka's rich contemporary art scene, i.e. on literature, theatre, and performing and visual arts, where a considerable amount of new and alternative knowledge/*savoir littéraire* (R. Barthes) has come into being since the end of the civil war, none of which has been critically explored yet.

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15.15

15.15

Wed March, 9th

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

14:30 Welcome Address

Roswitha Böhm TU Dresden, Vice-Rector University Culture

The Background: Inventory and Analysis of the Current Situation in Sri Lanka

Holger Seubert German Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives

The Art of New Alternatives? Nation-Building and the Creation of a >New Community< in Contemporary Sri Lankan Art

Stefan Horlacher Birte Heidemann-Malreddy TU Dresden

PANELI TERRITORY, IDENTITY, COMMUNITY AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN POST-WAR SRI LANKA

Territorial Anxieties: Identity Politics and the Antinomies of Community in Sri Lanka

Benedikt Korf University of Zurich

Making >Us< from >Them<: Identity Politics in the Peripheries

Thamali Kithsiri University of Peradeniya

Affective Justice for an Ineffective Transition? The Arts and Transitional/Transformative Justice in Post-War Sri Lanka

Lars Waldorf 17:00 University of Essex

- 17:00 CONFERENCE WARMING
- 19:30 CONFERENCE DINNER



PANEL II MEMORY, ARCHIVE AND COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKAN VISUAL ARTS

09.30

Space and Emotions, Remembering Traumas: The Politics of Post-War Sri Lankan Visual Arts

Priyantha Udagedara University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo

Traitors and the Art of Self-Censoring

Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan University of Jaffna

Remembering Eelam: Materiality and Memory at the Tamils of Lanka: A Timeless Heritage Exhibition (London 2019)

IRachel Seoighe11:00University of Kent, Canterbury

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PANEL III PEACE, CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY IN POST-WAR SRI LANKAN FILM

11:30 A Crisis of Nationhood: Post-War Sri Lankan Cinema and the Revisiting of History

Neluka Silva University of Colombo

Documenting Dissonance: Revisiting Sri Lankan Conflict Narratives through Jude Ratnam's Demons in Paradise

Nilanjana Premaratna University of Newcastle

The Bee and the Butterfly: Metamorphosis of the Queer Protagonist in Sri Lankan Cinema and Politics

- Visakesa Chandrasekaram 13:00 University of Colombo
- 13:00 LUNCH BREAK



PANEL IV AUTHENTICITY, TRUTH AND WITNESSING IN POST-WAR FICTION AND NON-FICTION

14:30 **Recording Post-War Sri Lanka:** Ethnographic and Narrative Perspectives

> Samanth Subramanian Cambridge, UK

Sri Lankan Witness Literature: Writing Truth and Truthiness

Minoli Salgado Manchester Metropolitan University

Writing in the Shadow of Authenticity: Sri Lankan Writing in English and Discourses of Authenticity

Harshana Rambukwella 15:00 Open University of Sri Lanka, Nugegoda

15:30 COFFEE BREAK

PANEL V ENACTING COMMUNITY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

16:00 The Enactment of Community in Sri Lankan Artistic Practice: Performance, Public Space, Politics

> Ruhanie Perera University of Colombo

The Community Will Hate You: War, Violent Families, and the Visceral Queer Diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil Body in *A Marriage of a Thousand Lies*

Shermal WijewardeneUniversity of Colombo

PUBLIC READING ART AND THE TRAUMA OF WAR

19:30 Minoli Salgado | Samanth Subramanian | Visakesa Chandrasekaram at The Sayon State and University Library Dress

at The Saxon State and University Library Dresden



March, 11th

PANEL VI CONNECTING (ACROSS) COMMUNITIES IN SRI LANKAN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE

09.30 Imagining Peace and Community in Selected Contemporary Sri Lankan Fictional Texts

Ruvani Ranasinha King's College, London

Diasporic Fractures and Community-Making in Channa Wickremesekera's Fiction

Mahendran Thiruvarangan University of Jaffna

Car-Sharing and Nation-Building: Noontide Toll and the Postcolonial Chauffeur

Wieland Schwanebeck TU Dresden

11:00 COFFEE BREAK

PANEL VII PEACE, MORALITY AND HOPE(LESSNESS) IN SRI LANKAN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE

11:30

11:00

SRI LANKAN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE Explorations of Complicit Enfoldings and (Radical) Unfoldings in Contemporary Sri Lankan Fiction

Cornelia Wächter

»You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on«: Story of a Brief Marriage and the Point Zero of Signification

Stefan Horlacher Thilini Meegaswatta TU Dresden

The Ontologies of Morality in Anuk Arudpragasam's A Passage North

Neloufer de Mel 13:15 University of Colombo

13:15 LUNCH BREAK & FAREWELL











PUBLIC READING —— FILM SCREENING —— LESUNG

AND THE TRAUMA OF

Minoli Salgado Samanth Subramanian Visakesa Chandrasekaram

hybrid und vor Ort @ SLUB / online and on-site @ SLUB Klemperer-Saal

KUNST TRAUMA KRIEG

as part of the conference

The Art of New Alternatives? Nation-Building and the Creation of a New Community in Contemporary Sri Lankan Art

> Mehr Informationen unter For more information

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ART AND THE TRAUMA OF WAR WAR

ince the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009 - a war which caused more than 100.000 casualties and lasted for 26 years - Sri Lanka has been trying to consolidate itself as a nation-state, rebuild its infrastructure and keep its tourism industry going. While its political leaders vehemently deny allegations of war crimes, refuse to deal with the past and try to keep a strong focus on >progress<, the cultural imaginary as it manifests in literature, film or interviews with witnesses and survivors, reveals that the experience of a traumatic past takes a heavy toll not only on the present but also on the future of this island nation. As a matter of fact, art can be seen as an important indicator of how a nation deals with its own >dangerous< history.

Award winning authors, journalists and film-makers MINOLI SALGADO, SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN and VISAKESA CHANDRASEKARAM will present excerpts from their work, demonstrating how the traumas of war still determine the present of Sri Lanka's different ethnic populations, how these traumas are slowly transformed into art and how art, be it literature, film or >simply< storytelling, can help to make the past bearable.

MINOLI SALGADO

Manchester Metropolitan University

SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN

Cambridge, UK

VISAKESA CHANDRASEKARAM

University of Colombo

02 — PUBLIC READING: ART AND THE TRAUMA OF WAR



MINOLI SALGADO is a writer and academic and the author of four books that explore the impact of the Sri Lankan Civil War: the critical study, *Writing Sri* Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place

(2007); the novel, A Little Dust on the Eyes (2014); a collection of short stories, Broken Jaw (2019); and a recently published book of narrative non-fiction, Twelve Cries from Home: In Search of Sri Lanka's Disappeared (2022). She is currently working on a Leverhulme-funded project on witness writing from a range of sites including Cambodia and Sri Lanka. She is Professor of International Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University.



SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN is an Indian writer and journalist. His book *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* was shortlisted for the Baillie Gifford Non-Fiction Prize and the Royal Society of Literature's Ondaatje Prize.



VISAKESA CHANDRASEKARAM is a lawyer, academic and an artist. He has made two feature films - Sayapethi Kusuma (Frangipani) and Paangshu (Earth) - which won many local and international awards. He has published two novels - Tigers Don't

Confess and The King and the Assassin. He has written and directed several stage plays including Forbidden Area, which won the Gratiaen Prize. Visakesa has worked in Sri Lanka as a human rights lawyer and in Australia as a consultant to the NSW Government. He currently works as a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Law at the University of Colombo.



Territorial Anxieties: Identity Politics and the Antinomies of Community in Sri Lanka

BENEDIKT KORF

University of Zurich

In this talk, I will argue that at the heart of Sri Lanka's identity politics is a »territorial anxiety«, and this anxiety continues to haunt Sri Lanka's politics; it is even proliferating after the war has ended. Territorial anxiety results in stubborn attempts to purify administrative (and political) entities into ethnically homogenous territorial containers through boundary re-demarcations. Administrative boundary demarcation and ethnic segregation thereby became increasingly entangled, and the administrative state increasingly ethnicised. Through a case study that illustrates the controversies and contradictions of boundary demarcation disputes in eastern Sri Lanka, I demonstrate the impossibility of this spatial politics of purification, as any re-demarcation produces new minorities, and exacerbates the territorial anxieties it was designed to overcome.

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Benedikt}}$ Korf is Professor of Political Geography at the University of Zurich, Switzerland.



Making >Us< from >Them<: Identity Politics in the Peripheries

Identity in post-war Sri Lanka has always been addressed along Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim tri-polarity. After a decade of inter-ethnic tension, violence, and conflict, the polarisation of ethnicity still maintains clear boundaries among Sri Lankans. This study examines the process of identity-making in three communities that live in the periphery. Ethnic ambiguity arising from personal names in Madukanda, Paanama and Thulawelliva represents the multicultural nature cultivated over time. These are sites of ambiguity as (Sinhala) names are either in Tamil naming style or bilingual (Sinhala-Tamil). During the last few decades, changing personal names has become a common practice among people living in these three areas. Sinhala ethnic identity thus is constructed through renaming associated with other identities such as religion, caste, and an attachment to a geographical region. At the same time, Tamil-ness(in names is seen as >other<. Hence, this study argues that identity does not resist fixity yet adopts fixity. In that respect, changing names in the periphery is a spatial practice of boundary-making since adopting identity fixity reinforces the identity politics of Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism.

THAMALI KITHSIRI is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. She teaches human geography courses, including Political Geography and Advanced Human Geography. She completed her PhD in Geography in 2021 at the University of Zurich. Her PhD studied how ethnic >mixed-ness(has been negotiated in an ethnically divided and polarised nation. Thamali's research focuses on identity politics, nationalism and everyday geography in Sri Lanka. She is currently working on how Muslim and Tamil identities have been suppressed by reconstructing shared spaces into >Sinhala-Buddhist<-dominated spaces.

THAMALI KITHSIRI

University of Peradeniya

LARS WALDORF

University of Essex

Affective Justice for an Ineffective Transition? The Arts and Transitional/Transformative Justice in Post-War Sri Lanka

Transitional justice seeks truth, justice, reparations, and institutional reforms to address gross human rights abuses after state violence and civil war. Having been critiqued as overly legalistic, corrective, top-down, state-centric, and decontextualised, transitional justice has increasingly taken the »affect turn«, »aesthetic turn«, and »performative turn«. In contrast to legalistic mechanisms, the visual and performing arts have potential to be more participatory, inclusive, multivocal, unsettling, imaginative, and transformative. The arts thus highlight the insufficiency of legalistic justice while offering the possibility for what Rush calls »affective justice« - that is, more »visceral notions of personal and collective responsibility«. Since the brutal end of the Sri Lankan Civil War, many artists have memorialised victims, challenged conflict narratives, promoted inter-ethnic understanding, and called for accountability through their art. This paper explores how these artists attempt »affective justice« and whether that makes a difference to current efforts to close the »impunity gap« or future prospects to achieve more transformative justice.

LARS WALDORF is a Professor at Essex Law School who has worked primarily on transitional justice and peace-building in Rwanda and Sri Lanka. He is currently Principal Investigator for »Performing/ Informing Rights« that brings together inclusive dance and the right to information for disabled people in Sri Lanka and Nepal (funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council). He was recently awarded a Fellowship from the American Institute of Sri Lankan Studies (AISLS) to research »Affective Transitional Justice for Sri Lanka's War Wounded«.

Space and Emotions, Remembering Traumas: The Politics of Post-War Sri Lankan Visual Arts

This presentation delves into the contemporary upraise in the production of space and emotions with the creation of contemporary paintings in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka, to commemorate occurrences of traumatic experiences of nearly 30 years of armed conflict which ended in 2009. The notion of landscape is used in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka to change the island's physical atmosphere, and the contemporary visual artists are responding to this urban and sub-urban transition through the genre of contemporary image-making. By exploring the work of contemporary Sri Lankan artists, the study questions how Post-Civil War Sri Lankan arts embodied traumatic reminiscences while creating a wounded non-representational space to articulate space and traumatic memories. The study explores issues of post-war art by mapping my experiences, reflexive cultural and political ideas, with an effort to establish post-war art as a new cultural genre that explores space, emotions, and traumas of Post-Civil War Sri Lanka. The study first examines the existing theoretical and contextual debate of placemaking with limitations to Sri Lanka, providing a historical outlook and background. Secondly, the study focuses on how Post-Civil War Sri Lankan art illustrates space, emotions, and traumatic reminiscences visually and materially to represent and depict emotions of a particular space.

PRIVANTHA UDAGEDARA'S principal research interests lie in the field of contemporary fine art practice focusing on South Asia. His research explores the contextual analysis of the »Notion of Paradise« in its relationship to socio-political ideology within the limitations of visual art. He has particular expertise and research interest in colonial-art, post-colonial art, and contemporary

PRIYANTHA UDAGEDARA

University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo

Western and Eastern visual culture. Udagedara is one of the most renowned artists and art historians in Sri Lanka with a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Contemporary Fine Art Practice and a Master of Arts degree in Contemporary Art and Design Practice from the Faculty of Arts and Design, Leeds Metropolitan University, through the »President Scholarship« awarded by the President's Fund, Sri Lanka, in the year 2006. Since the year 2018, he has been serving as a Senior Lecturer at the Department of History and Art Theory at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo. He is a practicing artist specialising in paintings and has exhibited nationally and internationally in countries including Sri Lanka, India, Australia, Portugal, Dubai, America and Great Britain.

Traitors and the Art of Self-Censoring

After the wining the civil war in 2009, the president of Sri Lanka announced that hereafter there would be no majorities and minorities in Sri Lanka but patriots and traitors. This re-labelling while allowing the age old inequalities to continue, marks all the voices of dissent as non-patriotic. In the post-independence politics of Sri Lanka, competing political parties and armed groups constantly use the word traitor to single out individuals and groups who have differences in opinion, ideology and vision. Dissent has been seen as a threat. On the other hand the nation-building project in Sri Lanka constantly produced its >Other< along the line of binaries such as Aryan-Dravidian, native-invader, Sinhalese-Tamils, majority-minority and South-North.

While the 1983 riots against the Tamils and the war between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil militant groups contributed to the shifts in the art practice of Jaffna, the JVP insurgency and the counter insurgency by the state led to the redefining of art in Colombo's art world after the 1990s. These two artistic responses from the North and the South against the state and non-state actors were treated by the present art-writing without distinction. Differences in the agency of the artist were not fully taken into consideration of existing art-writing. In this context, through a comparative reading of selected works of visual art produced during the time of war and the way they intertwine with the personal narratives of the authors, this paper inquires into the notion of artistic freedom in the context of ethnic polarisation. The paper looks for answers for the following questions: Did the artists of the different ethnic groups enjoy the same freedom of expression in the context of disparities of their relationship with the state? How does the state apparatus control visual art practices in general and the art practices of

THAMOTHARAMPILLAI SHANAATHANAN

University of Jaffna

the underprivileged section of society in particular? How did self-censoring shape the art of the ethnic and religious minorities? Did the surveillance and the state control of the memorialisation of the experiences of minorities open up new possibilities? How do artistic responses vary in terms of thematic and problematic according to the social position of the artist?

THAMOTHARAMPILLAI SHANAATHANAN is a visual artist and a Senior Lecturer in Art History, Department of Fine Arts, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. His art works explore the meaning of home in the context of displacement and migration. His works have been exhibited widely in Sri Lanka and at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Vancouver; at the Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane; the Museum of Ethnology, Vienna; the Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi; the Asian Art Archive, Hong Kong; the Kochi Art Biennial; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Lahore Biennial, the Dhaka Art Summit and the Sharjah Art Biennial among others. His artistic book projects include The One Year Drawing Project, The Incomplete Thombu and A-Z of Conflict. He is also the author of several articles and book chapters on modern and contemporary visual art in Sri Lanka. He received his PhD in Art History from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and is co-founder of the Sri Lankan Archive for Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design in Jaffna.

Remembering Eelam: Materiality and Memory at a London Tamil Diaspora Exhibition

Various memory projects have been created in Sri Lanka and in the Tamil diaspora which capture and reflect on the traumas and impacts of war, for the purposes of memorialisation, inter-community exchange, acknowledging community resilience and advocacy for justice. These projects have focused on the destruction and suffering generated by the war, and the human and social cost. This paper will explore the role of emotion, memory and materiality in the »Tamils of Lanka: a Timeless Heritage« exhibition, held in London in May 2019. This was a community-run project, organised to mark the tenth anniversary of the end of the war – a day usually marked by mourning and accountability-focused protests.

I will examine the content presented at the exhibition, focusing on the section documenting the de facto state of Tamil Eelam, and its destruction by the Sri Lankan state. Tamils lived in this nascent state under the governance of the Tamil Tigers; the exhibit attempted to recreate Eelam and provide an immersive experience for visitors, including images, text and a mock martyr's grave. Considering this exhibit as an educational tool, a practice of memory transmission and as a material encounter with the nascent state of Tamil Eelam, I explore its potential to generate affect, to reshape collective memory and promote conversations about political, structural change amongst the diaspora. I follow memory scholars in arguing that remembering is not simply educational, and not reducible to fetishisation or nostalgia, but »evoking the possibility of radical change« (Haugbolle 2019: 286; Toukan 2018). I explore the meaning of this memory work through observations and interviews with the exhibition organisers.

RACHEL SEOIGHE

University of Kent

RACHEL SEOIGHE is a lecturer in criminology in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Research, University of Kent. Her work explores state violence and resistance in Sri Lanka through frameworks of memory, narrative and denial. Her book *War, Denial and Nation-Building in Sri Lanka: After the End* (Palgrave 2017) is the outcome of her PhD in Law and Criminology at King's College London. In May 2019, with the Tamil Information Centre, she helped to organise, and conducted research on, the »Tamils of Lanka: a Timeless Heritage« exhibition in Tolworth, London.

A Crisis of Nationhood: Post-War Sri Lankan Cinema and the Revisiting of History

Cinema is »imbricated with national myth-making and ideological production and serves to delineate alterities and legitimize selfhood« (Dissanavake 1994: xiii). Since Independence in 1948, cinema has been a powerful genre, more sensitive than any cultural genre to the panoply of sociopolitical transformations in Sri Lanka. While serving as a vehicle of popular entertainment, the substantial patronage from the State Film Corporation has enabled cinema to become a conduit for producing and reinforcing hegemonic ideologies. Since the end of the long ethnic conflict in 2009, a plethora of films has gained its purchase from subliminally bolstering a narrow, chauvinist nationalist discourse which coincides with the valorisation of Sinhala Buddhism by the state by reinvoking a repertoire of hallowed narratives from a repository of history, myth, legend and biography.

This paper explores the implications of a resurgence of the historical genre in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka. Two popular films, *Mahindagamanaya* (2011) and *Anagarika Dharmapala Srimathano* (2014), which were highly acclaimed for their thematic content and cinematography and considered box office hits, reveal the significance of history and memory against a backdrop of reconciliation. The overarching emphasis on Buddhism and its nexus with Sinhala in the forging of cultural and national identities in the cinematic terrain will be interrogated against the upsurge of ethnic violence in the postwar landscape.

NELUKA SILVA is Senior Professor in English at the University of Colombo and was President of the University of Oxford Society, Sri Lanka. She is also a University of Cambridge certified coach. Her teaching and research are in the areas of South Asian Literary

NELUKA SILVA

University of Colombo

Work, Postcolonial Literature, Children's literature in Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan television and film, and Bilingualism in Sri Lanka. Her academic publications include *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writings from South Asia* (2004), *Politics and Theatre: A Comparative Study of the Construction of Nation and Gender in Contemporary Sinhalese and Bengali Theatres* (1999) and the edited collection *The Hybrid Island: Culture Crossings and the Invention of Identity in Sri Lanka* (2002). Her novel *The Iron Fence* (2011) was long-listed for the Commonwealth First Book Prize 2012 and for the Dublin IMPAC Prize 2012. Her other creative works are: *The Rolled Back Beach* (2008 – with Simon Harris), *Our Neighbours and Other Stories* (2009), and *My Elephant Secret and Other Stories* (2019). She was a visiting lecturer at the University of Athens, Greece (2016), Roskilde University, Denmark (2017), University of Liege, Belgium (2018) and JLU and TU Dresden, Germany (2017, 2020 & 2021).

Documenting Dissonance: Revisiting Sri Lankan Conflict Narratives through Jude Ratnam's *Demons in Paradise*

Documentary film can play an important role in peace and conflict studies, given its ability to present and problematise specific strands of fact and truth. This paper explores the particular ways in which the post-war documentary film *Demons in Paradise* engages with the Sri Lankan conflict communities. I draw attention to how *Demons in Paradise* disrupts Sri Lankan conflict narratives at three levels: it provides an alternative set of events, highlights parallel violent structures, and consequently disrupts popular sherox narratives. Through a process of self-reflexivity, *Demons in Paradise* questions assumptions of community and unsettles conflict certainties.

NILANJANA PREMARATNA is a Lecturer in International Politics at Newcastle University. Before joining Newcastle, she held fellowships at the university of Zurich and Umeå University, Sweden. Nilanjana's research takes place at the intersection of the arts, politics, and peace-building. Her first book, *Theatre for Peacebuilding: The Role of Arts in Conflict Transformation in South Asia* (Palgrave, 2018) examines the peace-building approach and practices of three theatre groups from Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India. Her current research explores how different art forms – specifically film, theatre, music, and literature – contend with past violence and present conceptualisations of peace and imagined futures in Sri Lanka.

NILANJANA PREMARATNA

Newcastle University

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VISAKESA CHANDRASEKARAM

University of Colombo

The Bee and the Butterfly: The Metamorphosis of the Queer Protagonist in Sri Lankan Cinema and Politics

The Bees Who Rejected the Blossom, the first Sri Lankan feature film with a gueer main role, portrayed the gay man as a sadistic psychopath. The film was nationally released in theatres in the early 1980s. hardly attracting any debate on the political correctness of the character construction. Fastforward thirty-five-years: in 2018, the President Sirisena usurped the term >butterfly(in a derogatory manner to publicly humiliate his antagonist Prime Minister Wickremesinghe who is supposedly a closeted gay man, but the President was met with a backlash as the queer community and their allies came forward demanding the withdrawal of the butterfly story, staging the first ever public protest themed on queer rights. In between this timespan, a handful of queer protagonists were brought to the Sri Lankan cinema, at times attracting the audience's sympathy to the gueer character and later on demanding their dignity. Exploring the parallels between the gueer cinema and gueer politics, this paper examines the trajectory of transformation of the queer protagonist in Sri Lankan cinema, on the backdrop of the queer people's attempt to construct a dignified queer citizen in the political domain. In doing so, this paper poses the question, if at all and to what extent the queer protagonist on the cinema screen has been inter-dependent with or independent to the queer citizen in the political domain. The methodology applied in this exercise mainly includes reviewing of existing peer reviewed literature, film footage, film reviews, social media material and presenting the filmmaker-author's selfreflection in directing and presenting Frangipani, one of the films referred to in this article.

VISAKESA CHANDRASEKARAM is a lawyer, academic and an artist. He has made two feature films - Sayapethi Kusuma (Frangipani) and Paangshu (Earth) - which won many local and international awards. He has published two novels - Tigers Don't Confess and The King and the Assassin. He has written and directed several stage plays including Forbidden Area, which won the Gratiaen Prize. Visakesa has worked in Sri Lanka as a human rights lawyer and in Australia as a consultant to the NSW Government. He currently works as a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Law at the University of Colombo.

Recording Post-War Sri Lanka: Ethnographic and Narrative Perspectives

SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN

Cambridge, UK

The immediate aftermath of the Sri Lankan war turned out to merely be an absence of open battle. Many other things remained the same: the Rajapaksa government, its attitude to minorities, the displacement of Tamils in the north and east, the repression of civil rights, the majoritarian spirit of the constitution, the general atmosphere of fear and trauma. In such a context, what are the duties and responsibilities - both practical and ethical - of a iournalist in the country? In »Recording Post-War Sri Lanka,« I explore this question with specific reference to my journalistic book. This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War. This book, like a couple of others written around the same time, attempted first to reckon with the kinds of narratives that had been missing during the war, and that needed to be excavated for a fuller picture of the war to emerge. It wrestled with the question of balance: whom to speak to, whose stories to privilege, who gets represented. It tried to understand the historical course of the war not at the level of statecraft and national politics but at the level of personal and communal memory. And as a journalist-researcher from India, I confronted the question of my own place in this project, as a Tamil, as an Indian, and as an outsider. What are the researcher's ethical dilemmas in such a situation? What is the purpose of the eventual narrative that the researcher produces? And what are the successes and failures of a method that prizes personal stories over a larger sweep of history and community?

SAMANTH SUBRAMANIAN is an Indian writer and journalist. His book *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* was shortlisted for the Baillie Gifford Non-Fiction Prize and the Royal Society of Literature's Ondaatje Prize.

Sri Lankan Witness Literature: Writing Truth and Truthiness

Sri Lankan popular discourse on the civil war is underscored by a contestation over facts that marks a crisis of truth. This paper argues that Sri Lankan witness literature in English - a form that encompasses both fiction and non-fiction - serves to fill the truth-bearing gap created by this contestation. It explores ways in which the testimonial mode of Sri Lankan witness texts articulates truth as a process of excavation and discovery that creates the space for new concepts of self and society. It also shows how the truth claims embedded in Sri Lankan witness writing are based on the fictive device of a construction of a narratable self, exploring this in relation to three contrasting texts: Galappatti and Boyagoda's A Long Watch, Niromi de Sovza's Tamil Tigress and Anuk Arudpragasam's A Passage North.

MINOLI SALGADO is a writer and academic and the author of four books that explore the impact of the Sri Lankan Civil War: the critical study, Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place (2007); the novel, A Little Dust on the Eyes (2014); a collection of short stories, Broken Jaw (2019); and a recently published book of narrative non-fiction, Twelve Cries from Home: In Search of Sri Lanka's Disappeared (2022). She is currently working on a Leverhulme-funded project on witness writing from a range of sites including Cambodia and Sri Lanka. She is Professor of International Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University.

MINOLI SALGADO

Manchester Metropolitan University

HARSHANA RAMBUKWELLA

Open University of Sri Lanka

Writing in the Shadow of Authenticity: Sri Lankan Writing in English and Discourses of Authenticity

Sri Lankan Writing in English (SLWE) has always been a contentious category. At one level there have been debates about whether such a category could be defined at all. Such debates have been informed by questions as to whether SLWE represents a sufficiently substantive body of literature both in literary substance and quantity to warrant being called a category. At another level there have been questions as to whether the very language it is written in, English, can be considered a legitimate medium of expression. Postcolonial cultural politics have played a large role in these deliberations and the English language and cultural expression in that language have been seen as lacking authenticity with one critic in the 1960s calling English a »language without a metaphor«. I have theorised authenticity as a conceptual and methodological heuristic elsewhere in exploring the cultural politics of Sinhala nationalism (the nationalism of the numerical majority in the country). In this presentation I attempt to extend the same heuristic to explore how notions of cultural authenticity have impinged upon and shaped SLWE. However, in doing so I also try to destabilise the concept of authenticity, as it is articulated in the Sinhala mainstream, and instead to pluralise the notion of authenticity to see how different sites of authenticity or different authenticities have informed English writing in the country. Through this exploration I hope to offer some insights into the broader discussion about the social and political forces that have shaped English creative writing in Sri Lanka historically.

HARSHANA RAMBUKWELLA was Director and Postgraduate at the Institute of English, Open University of Sri Lanka, and is currently Professor in English at the same institution. Harshana has held fellowships at the Institute for Advanced Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Edinburgh, Institute of Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, The University of Zurich and was the Sri Lanka Chair at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany, in 2019. His book The Politics and Poetics of Authenticity: A Cultural Genealogy of Sinhala Nationalism was published by University College London Press (UCL Press) in 2018 and he is a trustee of the Gratiaen Trust which awards the Gratiaen Prize for Sri Lankan writing in English. He has served on the juries of the national Swarna Pusthaka Awards for the Sinhala novel, the national Fairway Literature Awards and the State Literary Prize. Harshana has published in areas ranging from socio-linguistics, literary and cultural studies to history in journals such as boundary 2, Journal of Asian Studies and the International Journal for the Sociology of Language (IJSL). He is an Editorial Board Member of IJSL and an Associate Editor of the Journal of Sociolinguistics.

RUHANIE PERERA

University of Colombo

The Enactment of Community in Sri Lankan Artistic Practice: Performance, Public Space, Politics

On 20 August 2021, photographs of what was framed as a three-day protest that took place in Colombo in the Western Province against the curtailing of the freedom of expression by artist Sampath Thilina began circulating on local social media accounts across the following platforms: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. The social media posts used the hashtag #weresist, an indication of collectivity and community. Sampath Thilina is both a performance artist and an art teacher in a national school in the Western Province, and this performance took place on the street as part of the strike action called by the Ceylon Teachers' Union (CTU), the Ceylon Teacher Service Union, and the United Teachers' Union, among others. The performance was framed and documented as a >protest(, and as this paper will argue, offers a site through which to consider the dynamics of community and citizenship in performance. In presenting a scope for >performance(, performance) theorist Diana Taylor asserts that performances act as »vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity through reiterated behaviour«. She also makes the point that performances also travel, »challenging and influencing other performances. Yet they are, in a sense, always in situ: intelligible in the framework of the immediate environment and issues surrounding them«. This paper then attempts an interpretation of this idea of the vital acts of transfer, which is useful to clarify in relation to the key argument of enacting community in/through performance.

RUHANIE PERERA is a lecturer at the Department of English, University of Colombo. Until January 2022, she held the post of Curator, Education and Public Programmes at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka, launched in December 2019. *Inscribing Her* (performed at the Theertha Performance Platform in 2015 and the International Art Critics' Association Seminar in 2013) and *Somewhere Between Truth and its Telling* (first performed at Stranger Than Fiction in London 2012, and presented as an archived video work at the exhibition »one hundred thousand small tales« in 2019) are two of her solo performances that reflect her preoccupation as a performer with the body, embodiment, and the lived experience of women.

SHERMAL WIJEWARDENE

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»The Community Will Hate You«: War, Violent Families, and the Visceral Queer Diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil Body in *A Marriage of a Thousand Lies*

This paper explores S.J. Sindu's mapping of visceral connections between Sri Lankan Tamil migrant experiences of war-related violence in Sri Lanka and the perpetration of anti-queer violence in their diasporic families in her novel A Marriage of a Thousand Lies (2017). The novel appears to deploy a conventional trope in depicting intergenerational power struggles between first-generation Sri Lankan Tamil migrant mothers who discipline their American-born daughters into conforming to a narrowly defined Sri Lankan Tamil identity punctuated by cisgender expression, heterosexual marriage, and children. I propose that the novel complicates this formula, and that in portraying fractures in the creation of a ynew community, it eschews polarities and instead focuses on the meshing of generational narratives. My analysis is informed by Gopinath's (2010) theorising of »queer diasporic affect« which permits attending to the »materiality of the everyday — the anti-monumental, the small, the inconsequential (p. 165). This approach permits a close focus on the everyday felt experiences of the ylesbiand narrator, Lakshmi (Lucky) who is in a marriage of convenience with a gay man, expediently negotiating family expectations to be >normal< and uphold tradition and family reputation while desiring her ex-lover, Nisha, whose marriage has been arranged by her Sri Lankan Tamil family. Drawing on the delineation of »viscerality« by Holland et al. (2014) as »a phenomenological index for the logics of desire, consumption, disgust, health, disease, belonging, and displacement«, I analyse how Lucky's everyday experience of lying and negotiating anti-queer violence in the diasporic family and community is rendered primarily through a visceral language, foregrounding responses from her skin,

blood, bones, muscles, and fingers. I employ the notion of »visceral logics«, outlined by Holland et al. (2014) as constituting »relational maps that obscure the distinction between self and other, subject and object, persons, things, and animals« (p. 395). The paper finds that Lucky's embodied symbolism acquires meaning in the light of a web of similar affective references in the stories told by her grandmother, her mother, and her father's wife, Aunty Laila, of fleeing anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka. It concludes that the novel's engagement with notions of creating a ynew community (appear in the interstices of its cross-generational narratives, and that the viscerality of the queer diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil body productively tropes connections between war-time experiences and histories, and anti-queer violence.

SHERMAL WIJEWARDENE holds an MPhil in English Studies from the University of Oxford, and a PhD in Gender Studies from Monash University, Australia. She teaches at the Department of English, University of Colombo. Her research focuses on gender, sexuality, and human rights work across literature, cinema, social movements, the media, law, and the digital. She has served in various capacities in feminist and LGBTQ organisations in Sri Lanka, and her activist and research engagements are positioned at the intersections of queer and feminist politics. Her publications include *Human Rights Practice: Towards a Thick Description* (2014) with Vijay K. Nagaraj and 3D Things: Devices, Technologies, and *Women's Organising in Sri Lanka* (2015) with Kumudini Samuel.

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Imagining Peace and Community in Selected Contemporary Sri Lankan Fictional texts

RUVANI RANASINHA

King's College London

My paper explores the portrait of inter-ethnic friendship, class solidarity, and intermarriage in the late radical ideologue and former director of the Institute of Race Relations in London, Ambalavaner Sivanandan's mature debut novel When Memory Dies (1997). Sivanandan's novel powerfully suggests that Sri Lanka's diverse communities are not inevitably mutually incompatible, antagonistic and hostile. This stands in contrast to other Sri Lankan fictions that appear less confident about the possibilities of coexistence and intercommunal marriage and friendship. If Sivanandan's historical novel When Memory Dies emphasises past inter-communal amity, then the late Nihal De Silva's award-winning novel The Road from Elephant Pass (2003) attempts to demonstrate the potential for inter-communal reconciliation, while in V. V. Ganeshananthan's Love Marriage (2009) broader conflicts are explored through the metaphor of mutable familial dynamics.

RUVANI RANASINHA is Professor of Global Literatures at King's College University in London. She received her PhD from the University of Oxford. She works primarily on South Asia and South Asian diaspora, with particular interests in immigration, book history, gender, globalisation and Sri Lankan studies. Her most recent publication on Sri Lankan fiction, »The Novel of Sri Lanka« appeared in The Oxford History of the Novel in English (Oxford University Press, 2019). She is the author of Hanif Kureishi: Writers and their Works Series (Plymouth: Northcote House in association with The British Council, 2002), South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation (Oxford University Press, 2007) and Contemporary South Asian Women's Fiction: Gender, Narration and Globalisation (Palgrave, 2016) and the lead editor of South Asians Shaping the Nation, 1870-1950: A Sourcebook (Manchester University Press, 2012). With Alex Tickell, she coedited Delhi: New Literatures of the Megacity (Routledge 2020). She
is currently writing the biography of the British Asian writer Hanif Kureishi for Manchester University Press. She is Consultant Editor on *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*.

Diasporic Fractures and Community-Making in Channa Wickremesekera's Fiction

MAHENDRAN THIRUVARANGAN

University of Jaffna

The question of community-making figures prominently in Channa Wickremesekera's fiction which focuses on the inter and intra community relationships among the Sri Lankan diaspora in Australia. While foregrounding the ways in which the fissures that originate from the homelands reterritorialise themselves in the new cultural landscape of the metropolis, Wickremesekera's texts also bring to the fore how the racial and class-based hierarchies of the metropolis make the process of community-building fraught with contradictions, conflicts and even violence. In this paper, I argue that the violence and exclusions amidst which the members of the diasporic communities portrayed in Wickremsekera's novels live collapse the national/ transnational binary and produce Sri Lanka as a fracturing experience that always spills out of its political boundaries and makes multi-ethnic community-making in a white-supremacist context a vexing challenge.

MAHENDRAN THIRUVARANGAN is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Jaffna. He teaches early-modern writings, postcolonialism and South Asian literatures. His research interests include decolonisation and the nation-state, literature and land, and radical democracy.

Car-Sharing and Nation-Building: Noontide Toll and the Postcolonial Chauffeur

Romesh Gunesekera's novel *Noontide Toll* employs a classic dialectical trope to emblematise the contested process of nation-building and reconciliation in Post-Civil War Sri Lanka. The narrator of the novel insists that it is not his place to ask questions: »I was only the driver now«, and his near-philosophical musings on driving clearly resonate with the country's difficulties in moving forward: »You need to check your rear-view mirror, but you can't be looking back all the time – not unless you are in permanent reverse«.

In my talk, I will not only analyse the different ways in which the history of Sri Lanka becomes manifest in Noontide Toll's story about a driver taking tourists around »this wounded country«, I will also flesh out the history of the chauffeur motif in the context of postcolonial literature and film. The chauffeur/passenger dynamic offers tantalising questions about who is really in charge: is it the passenger who determines the parameters of the trip and who fixes the destination, or is it, in fact, the driver, whose perspective tends to be favoured in the stories and without whom the vehicle would not move forward? I will discuss these questions with a special focus on the master/servant dialectic in seminal chauffeur tales like Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger (2008), Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot (1953), as well as controversial award-winning films about racial and class divides, including Driving Miss Daisy (1989) and Green Book (2018).

WIELAND SCHWANEBECK is a researcher in British literature and culture. His fields of research include Gender and Masculinity Studies, British popular culture, the genre of comedy, and Adaptation Studies. His publications include the *Metzler Handbook* of Masculinity Studies (co-ed. with Stefan Horlacher and Bettina Jansen, 2016) and, most recently, *Literary Twinship from Shakespeare* to the Age of Cloning (Routledge, 2020).

WIELAND SCHWANEBECK

TU Dresden

Explorations of Complicit Enfoldings and (Radical) Unfoldings in Contemporary Sri Lankan Fiction



TU Dresden

Towards the end of Dhananjaya Karunarathne's play The Jury (Jūriya 1993), a garbage collector who had found a severed human leg, horrified by the allpervasive indifference to the lost life the leg signifies. addresses the impassive jury in desperation: »How can you all sit there and just look on? What is that silence that you are all jointly keeping? How much longer are you planning to sit there in silence? Or are you thinking that as in a play you can sit aside and iust watch?« (95). The play thus chimes in with Thomas Docherty's observation that we live in deeply irresponsible times« (2016, 18). More specifically, one might speak of political complicity or »a political endorsement of >things as they are(«; of »abnegate[ing] responsibility, through quietism, which is the political correlative of silence« (2016, 27). In breaking the fourth wall and inviting the audience to take action and break the silence. Karunarathne expands the attribution of complicity by silence from the intratexual level of the play to society at large and calls for a sense of collective responsibility. To use Donna Haraway's spelling, it promotes »response-ability« - the practiced or trained ability to respond to rather than to avert the gaze. At the same time, in its pessimistic trajectory, the play also maps out the roots of a systematic untraining of >response-ability(and thus a collective enfolding into complicity. This paper views The Jury and other examples of contemporary Sri Lankan fiction through the prism of current research on complicity. Taking its cue from Mark Sanders and John Storey, it regards complicity in light of its etymological roots (Latin: cum plectere) as >foldedtogether-ness. More specifically, it reads complicityas-foldedness in the sense of an enfolding into a socially constructed reality that appears to be without alternatives. The paper is concerned with

literature's epistemological capacity to render visible processes of enfolding into complicity in their contextual specificity, as well as literature's potential to facilitate what Storey calls »a radical unfolding« out of complicity.

CORNELIA WÄCHTER is Professor of British Cultural Studies at Dresden University of Technology, Germany. She is the author of *Place-ing the Prison Officer: The »Warder in the British Literary and Cultural Imagination* (2015) and co-editor of, for instance, *Complicity and the Politics of Representation* (2019). She is the principal investigator and coordinator of the international, interdisciplinary network »Complicity: Enfoldings and Unfoldings«, funded by the German Research Foundation. STEFAN

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THILINI

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MEEGASWATTA

Story of a Brief Marriage and the Point Zero of Signification

»You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on«:

Anuk Arudpragasam's The Story of a Brief Marriage (2016) imaginatively recreates the last stage of Sri Lanka's Civil War from a microcosmic perspective. The primary question this talk engages with is what solutions the novel offers to war, trauma, and to the loss of humanity in conditions of extreme disruption and violence that are chronicled and memorialised in the narrative in graphic, disturbing minutiae. The attempt is to ask whether there is a subtext or an valternatives that the novel (unwillingly?) offers with regard to the debilitating, dehumanising violence of the war-zone. Therefore we will analyse how the protagonist navigates the impossible conditions of a >state of exception(and of a reduction to >bare life(in the war zone, how, functionalising the abject, he resorts to rituals to sustain his humanity and make meaning out of the nothingness he is reduced to. Pointing out functional similarities between ritual. religion and art for what it means to be a human being, we inquire whether Arudpragasam's novel indirectly offers its readers the chance of a new beginning through cleansing, through catharsis, through the experience of what Joseph Conrad's protagonist Kurtz in Heart of Darkness has described as »the horror, the horror«.

STEFAN HORLACHER is Chair of English Literature at Dresden University of Technology. His monograph, *Conceptions of Masculinity in the Works of Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence* (2006, in German) won the Postdoctoral Award of the German Association of Professors of English. His latest publications comprise *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice* (2015), *Metzler Handbook of Masculinity Studies* (2016, in German); *Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives* (2016); *Contemporary Masculinities in the UK and the US: Between Bodies and Systems* (2017), *Comparative Masculinity Studies* and the Question of Narrative, special issue of: Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL) 43/2 (2018), and GenderGraduateProjects V – Women's Movements, Queerness/ Intersex, Feminist Pornography (2021, in German).

THILINI MEEGASWATTA is a PhD student at the Chair of English Literature at Dresden University of Technology, working on configurations of South Asian Masculinities in contexts of war and conflict. She completed her BA (honours) in English Studies at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, and her MA at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. She has taught at Kotelawala Defence University and the Open University of Sri Lanka. Thilini's post graduate research on literary representation of gender in the context of Sri Lanka's war has resulted in a number of paper presentations and publications including »Life Narratives of Sri Lanka's Tamil Women in War and its Aftermath: Insights and Implications« (in publication for Contemporary South Asia); »Beyond Hegemonic Masculinities: Men and Masculine Identities in Life Narratives of Sri Lanka's War« (in publication for the Journal of South Asian Studies); and »Violence as a Site of Women's Agency in War: the Representation of Female Militants in Sri Lanka's Post-War Literature« (2019) in the Journal of International Women's Studies.

The Ontologies of Morality in Anuk Arudpragasam's *A Passage North*

NELOUFER DE MEL

University of Colombo

Discussing morality in late modernity, Adi Ophir notes that moral claims are suspect today because of their instrumental use by aid entrepreneurs, and humanitarian and political actors who »refine their concern in the mal-being of others« (2006: 96). In this context, the crucial task, for Ophir, is to »reopen the question [of morality] itself« and contemplate if, where, and how we may »not always be duped by morality« (2006: 98). This paper examines the work of morality in Anuk Arudpragasam's Booker Prize short listed novel A Passage North, paying special attention to its presence in the story. In what ways is morality constructed in the novel, and how does it drive the story's ontologies of anxiety, guilt, sacrifice, and violence? How is it gendered? What is its connection to topography, and what does the passage from south to north signify as both a rite, and a postcolonial impulse to deprovincialise the periphery? Ultimately, in what ways is the Sri Lankan war performatively worlded in the novel? To analyse the novel through these vectors is to acknowledge Arudpragasam as a new and powerful voice in diasporic creative writing on Sri Lanka, and as a writer who compels us to engage with current critical thought on humanitarian morality and urges us to move beyond some of its assumed binaries.

Ophir, Adil. (2006). »Disaster as a place of morality: The sovereign, the humanitarian and the terrorist.« *Qui Parle* 16 (1), 95-116.

NELOUFER DE MEL is Senior Professor of English (Chair) at the Department of English, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. She is the author of *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict* (2007) and *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in 20th Century Sri Lanka* (2001). Her recent journal publications and edited volumes have been on post-war Sri Lanka, providing feminist, postcolonial and cultural studies perspectives on questions of gender, justice, and performance. She is the chairperson of the Gratiaen Trust, founded by the Canadian-Sri Lankan author Michael Ondaatje to recognise and promote Sri Lankan creative writing in English. She has held several distinguished research fellowships at international universities and academic institutes including Yale, the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, and the Universities of Zurich and New York.



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