

Coloniality, Ontology, and the Question of the Posthuman

This book brings together emerging insights from across the humanities and social sciences to highlight how postcolonial studies are being transformed by increasingly influential and radical approaches to nature, matter, subjectivity, human agency, and politics. These include decolonial studies, political ontology, political ecology, indigeneity, and posthumanisms. The book examines how postcolonial perspectives demand of posthumanisms and their often ontological discourses that they reflexively situate their own challenges within the many long histories of decolonised practice. Just as postcolonial research needs to critically engage with radical transitions suggested by the ontological turn and its related posthumanist developments, so too do posthumanisms need to decolonise their conceptual and analytic lenses. The chapters' interdisciplinary analyses are developed through global, critical, and empirical cases that include city spaces and urbanisms in the Global North and South; food politics and colonial land use; cultural and cosmic representation in film, theatre, and poetry; nation building; the Anthropocene; materiality; the void; pluriversality; and, indigenous worldviews. Theoretically and conceptually rich, the book proposes new trajectories through which postcolonial and posthuman scholarships can learn from one another and so critically advance.

Mark Jackson is Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Geographies at the University of Bristol, UK.

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Series Editor:

Mark Jackson,

Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Geographies,

School of Geographical Sciences,

University of Bristol, UK

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8 Ethno-linguistic cartographies as colonial embodiment in postcolonial Sri Lanka

Chitra Jayathilake

[W]e have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and apparatuses. And, between these two, as a third class, subjects.

I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses.

—Agamben, 2009:14

In *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, Zygmunt Bauman describes the 'population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay' as 'excessive' or 'redundant' – 'wasted humans' (2004: 5). He summarises the 'production of human waste' (Ibid.) as follows:

To be 'redundant' means to be supernumerary, unneeded, of no use – whatever the needs and uses are that set the standard of usefulness and indispensability. The others do not need you; they can do as well, and better, without you. There is no self-evident reason for your being around and no obvious justification for your claim to the right to stay around. To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of because of being disposable – just like the empty and non-refundable plastic bottle or once-used syringe, an unattractive commodity with no buyers, or a substandard or stained product without use thrown off the assembly line by the quality inspectors.

(2004: 12)

Bauman's metaphors of objectification refer to unwanted populations who show degrees of social uselessness. Non-utility is decided by the non-wasted. This chapter presents a close reading of the Sri Lankan playwright of the English language Ernest Thalayasingam MacIntyre's play-text *Rasanayagam's Last Riot: A Political Fiction for the Theatre* (1990) focussing on how populations are both 'declared redundant' and painted as 'wasted humans' in the ethno-linguistic cartographies of postcolonial Sri Lanka. It shows how ethno-linguistic embodiment cartographically produces biopolitical effects materialised through the diverse apparatuses that make up human agency and subjection.

An apparatus is 'literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors,

opinions or discourses of living beings' (Agamben, 2009: 14). It is not only Michel Foucault's (1995) contrivances such as prisons, panopticons and schools which regulate human beings, but also,

the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and – why not – language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses.

(Agamben, 2009: 14)

Agamben explains that apparatuses are 'rooted in the very process of "humanization" that made "humans" out of the animals' (2009: 16). The apparatus, for Agamben, as for Foucault, is not confined to linguistic forms; it refers to non-linguistic means as well, but he emphasises the political power of language in contemporary societies. He posits a comparative and productive process between the pejorative treatment of certain populations and languages. Those produced as waste (i.e. the migrant, the landless, the poor, etc.) are stripped of dignity and claims to human association because of 'the vicious entwining of language, people, and the state' (2000: 67); they are made 'peoples without a state', for instance, 'Palestinians and Jews of the Diaspora' by the language and exercise of the state (Agamben, 2000: 67). They are 'oppressed and exterminated with impunity, so as to make clear that the destiny of a people can only be a state identity, [...] the concept of people makes sense only if recodified within the concept of citizenship' (2000: 67–68). What I emphasise here is how language in the Sri Lankan postcolonial contexts mobilised by MacIntyre's play both enforces and resists enforcement through textual and para-textual assemblages.

As implied in the epigraph, Agamben (2009) problematises the way in which the binary between human beings and apparatuses is produced. The status of the human qua human resides in how the interaction of the apparatuses with what Agamben calls *zoe* or life manifests as legitimate, or as waste. To put it differently, human beings become 'human' as defined by colonial and postcolonial apparatuses through the praxis and actions of the apparatuses themselves, whether these be language apparatuses, or material, or, most likely, imbrications of language and materialities in and through practices.

This chapter explores the ways in which MacIntyre's play portrays the biopolitics of embodiment in Sri Lanka's recent history. It probes the involvement of transnational media, especially the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), as dislocated biopolitical apparatuses bound up with Sri Lanka's colonial legacy, and questions a minority English-speaking elite's perspectives on – and detachment from – ethnic tensions with which, largely, they do not dialogue. My analysis problematises received views of biopolitics as typically limited to state-population management, and gestures towards a reading of the play-as-text as a manifestly postcolonial experience and reproduction of the debris of colonialism.

Biopolitical apparatuses exercised through ethno-linguistic cartographies make populations irrelevant; specific people, individuals, emotional anchors are deprived of their political existence or life proper, culminating in undue death. I argue that it is as a result of colonial biopolitics that populations, or more precisely people,

in postcolonial territories exacerbate ethno-linguistic differences, which end in turmoil and destruction. Debris legacies of colonial embodiment – the legacies of colonialism in the postcolonial present – imbricate distributed language devices such as aural materialities and tele-media to instantiate the agency of these violent apparatuses. The discussion problematises how biopolitics affects postcolonial human beings, makes them ‘subjects’ in contemporary socio-political milieux, and how resistance is manifest through creative interventions between human beings and apparatuses. I interrogate the legality of such biopolitical apparatuses, reflecting on the process of colonial embodiment and its diverse forms and aspects exercised through biopolitical apparatuses for future rectification. I aim to open a space to reflect meaningfully on the praxis of biopolitical apparatuses that remain operative in postcolonial nations. With this aim, the discussion ensues with a brief historical background to postcolonial Sri Lankan language policies and a particular event of violence that emerged in 1983; these are necessary to understand better the play.

Historical contexts

Playwright Macintyre’s representation of the impact of state and language apparatuses on people foregrounds the relentless conflict that has been specific to the modern politics of postcolonial Sri Lanka. His 1990 English language play *Rasanayagam’s Last Riot*, the focus of this chapter, is set in 1983, while also referencing the wider postcolonial era from the early 1950s to 1983. Despite the resolution passed on gaining independence from British colonisation in 1948 that English be replaced by both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages of the nation, what materialised through this Swabhasha (self-language) movement in postcolonial Sri Lanka is what has become a ‘Sinhala-only language policy’ enacted in the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 (see Neil De Votta, 2007, and Imtiaz and Stavis, 2008). It must be noted here that this Act is commonly referred to as Swabhasha policy. Accordingly, only Sinhala (used by the majority Sinhalese ethnic population) was considered as the official language from the 1950s, until it was reformed later, according to the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka and its amendments in 1987.¹

Although this policy was a political decision implemented in postcolonial Sri Lanka, its history is strictly bound up with colonisation. As Bill Ashcroft argues, ‘[the] post-colonized nation, that wonderful utopian idea, proved to be a focus of exclusion and division rather than unity; perpetuating the class divisions of the colonial state rather than liberating national subjects’ (2009: 12). One effect of the language policy was that it created the structural, state-bound means to exacerbate fissures between the two dominant ethnic groups, Sinhalese and Tamil. As Imtiaz and Stavis show (2008: 4), ‘the contemporary pattern of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka have been largely shaped by its colonial history. Extant problems arose when colonial rulers favoured and allied with a particular group, often a minority, to help in colonial administration’; these created ‘fissures’ between ethnic groups (see also De Votta, 2007: 77). In the 1840s, British evangelicals compelled the colonial rulers to make Sri Lanka a ‘bastion of Christianity’; the

proselytisers 'vilified Buddhism and Hinduism' but were 'especially critical of Buddhist monks' (De Votta, 2007: 13). Moreover, aligned with the administration policy of 'divide and rule', British rulers 'disproportionately' provided Government employment to Tamils and supported Christians while leading the Sinhalese Buddhists to mobilise (De Votta, 2007: 14). Evidently, the British administration's policies favoured the Tamil minority and subsequently had a negative impact on the unity between Tamil and Sinhalese populations.

When independence was granted in 1948, Sinhalese political leaders attempted to recoup political and economic influence and extended their power to marginalise Tamils through linguistic means. De Votta summarises the reasons for the ostracism of Tamils and the implementation of 'Sinhala-only language policy' as follows.

The marginalization of Buddhism during colonialism, Britain's divide-and-rule policies that favoured the Tamil minority, [and] the subsequent over-representation in the civil service, armed forces, universities and professional bodies [. . .] had contributed to the clamour by Sinhalese Buddhist forces for a Sinhala-only policy.

(De Votta, 2007: 17)

The Sinhala-only or Swabhasha policy (1956) can be read as a counter-response to the colonial rulers' administrative policies. The political conditions of ethnic tension are inextricably bound up with the colonial era; in the contemporary Sri Lankan context, Foucault is correct when he writes that '[r]acism first develops with colonization' (2003: 257). For Foucault, racism emerges through explicitly biopolitical strategies of population representation, measurement, and control. As the discursive practices of European colonialism in Sri Lanka were predicated on an ethnicised politics of population management, linguistic cartographies were – and remain – key biological stratagems in terms of which populations were made 'subjects', during – and after – colonisation. As the chapter goes on to show, however, these linguistic cartographies and their resistances are materialised in the physical capacities of specific imagined and real bodies, as well as in how the distributed ecologies of real and imagined embodiment include transnational media, telecommunications, and, indeed, the text, paratext, and staging of MacIntyre's play itself.

Aligned with the Swabhasha policy since 1956, the medium of instruction in almost all educational institutions remained either Sinhala or Tamil.² Populations of the two major ethnic groups studied in their own first language and had scarce access to the language of the other, which led to the creation and extension of language barriers. Together with territorial demarcations and concentrations, with the Tamil minority pre-dominant in the country's north and eastern regions, divisive linguistic cartographies were further emphasised by the fact that English, previously the lingua franca of colonial government, was partly considered treasonous and un-patriotic within an explicitly postcolonial context. However, a small minority of upper middle-class elite from both Sinhalese and Tamils groups continued to have access to English education. Language was employed as a tool

in violent ethnic conflicts that emerged from colonial legacy. An apposite case in point of overt ethnic violence is 'Black July'.

Black July

Black July was a Sri Lankan anti-Tamil pogrom exercised by Sinhalese mobs during July 1983 in reaction to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacks. The LTTE was a separatist militant organisation that claimed an independent state for Tamils in the North East of the country. In Gamini Samaranyake's words, the LTTE was 'the most ferocious guerrilla organization in South Asia' (1997: 109). The impetus for the mob riots was the death of thirteen Sri Lankan Army soldiers killed by the LTTE in Jaffna, and the Government's subsequent plan to stage a state funeral for the deceased in Colombo (see Nira Wickramasinghe, 2006 and Basil Fernando, 2012). As Fernando asserts 'there were many culprits who caused the havoc that virtually destroyed the image of Sri Lanka and which gave justification for a prolonged period of violence' (2012 [n.p.], quoting Cooray, 2002: 60–63). Cooray (2002) has argued that, partly due to the powerlessness of the state and the questionable decisions undertaken by certain politicians, Black July intensified civil war tensions and the country experienced a significant period of chaos.

The state armed forces were outraged by the LTTE's actions and did not want the funeral to be held in Jaffna, the urban locus for LTTE political independence. The Sri Lankan President, influenced by the Army, decided to bury the dead in the main cemetery in Colombo, offering a state funeral while ignoring the objections of influential leaders including the Prime Minister. The standard procedure is to hand over the dead to family members of the deceased for burial or cremation in their home villages according to funeral customs.³ The state funeral prevented the deceased's family members from deciding on burial locations and ceremonies. Moreover, this LTTE's attack and the opposing views for a state funeral created a space for socio-political opportunists to take advantage of the chaotic situation. As Cooray writes, 'there was an organized crowd [my emphasis] present [in the cemetery] making a huge show of grief' and prior to the arrival of the dead bodies from Jaffna, the crowd was 'ready'. He had 'warned' that the 'drama would end with a riot' (Ibid.). Cooray adds that

[w]e could do nothing to stop the killing, the destruction. The President made a mistake in putting the Army in charge of restoring law and order. After the killing of the 13 soldiers the mood in the military was a very dangerous one and they were not really motivated in stopping the violence.

(Ibid.)

If, as Imtiaz and Stavis claim, 'elite political leaders . . . win support and strengthen their positions by mobilizing along ethnic cleavages' (2008: 7), then the actions taken by political elite were directly linked to the fuelling of ethnic tensions between some populations of Sinhalese and Tamil, and, in turn, the foment of divisions by colonial and bio-political legacies. Following Black July, the country experienced a 30-year civil war between the State and the LTTE that

lasted from the late 1980s until 2009, with the death of the LTTE's leader. How the riot and eventual state of civil war become visible through a materialised biopolitics of language is explored in MacIntyre's play.

Rasanayagam's Last Riot

Rasanayagam's Last Riot premiered in 1990 in Australia. MacIntyre had migrated to Australia in the early 1970s, yet contributed to Sri Lanka's Anglophone theatre by writing plays about Sri Lankan socio-political issues.⁴ Set in the midst of Black July, the play narrativises the brutal violence exercised by Sinhalese mobs against Tamil civilians living in Colombo, and problematises the state's involvement in this brutality. *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* is a thinly fictionalised account of the real events of Black July; MacIntyre asserts that his play is an allegory of the conflict and refers to actual events (1990). The play represents ethnic cleansing, specifically exercised through ethno-linguistic cartographies and biopolitical apparatuses that occur on a national level.

Rasanayagam's Last Riot had several performances and was well-received in Australia (Thangapandian, 2013), yet has been scarcely been staged in Sri Lanka for three reasons. First, performing ethnic violence in a country rife with ethnic violence is inadvisable. Second, as English is neither the first nor second language of the majority of residents, Anglophone plays are neither popular nor profitable. MacIntyre's play has been confined to English-speaking elite in Colombo and largely for educational purposes. Third, the political milieu of a country in negotiations of tense peace is largely unaccepting of critical portrayals of state and biopolitical complicities by exiled writers. Yet, in spite of its contested political resonances, the play remains understudied and begs further analysis.

My analysis shows that the play is a powerful metaphorical transposition of the biopolitical removal of populations, whose identity is tied to a country still dominated by a dislocated, though present, colonial legacy of material coercion. Although aspects of the media apparatus and its transnational legacy remain in postcolonial Sri Lanka, they function covertly; they are identified in this chapter as dislocated and distancing materialities.

Rasa: 'Human waste'

The status of 'human' ascribed, or not, to living beings is decided through the operation of discursive apparatuses. In Agamben's eyes, the biological existence of human beings becomes subject to political decisions and objectification, and is stripped from its political existence through biopolitical apparatuses. Its status is 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). In this regard, *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* provides literary testimony of biopolitical apparatuses implemented in postcolonial Sri Lanka, but which function as colonial embodiments – apparatuses that deprive human beings of their political and biological existence. The discussion here expounds upon the ways in which Rasanayagam (Rasa), the protagonist of the play, 'a middle-aged Jaffna Tamil living and working in Colombo' (1990: 149), becomes a 'wasted human', a victim of biopolitical exercise and violence

of language. I note here the symbolism of naming: in many South Asian cultural grammars, 'Rasa' refers to an aesthetic or 'agreeable quality'; hence, 'Rasa' the character embodies how an aesthetic value or favourable feeling is symbolically rendered waste and redundant via the intervention of biopolitics.

All three characters who appear on-stage in the play belong to the English-speaking, university-educated elite in Colombo. A middle-aged interracial-couple, Sinhalese Philip Fernando and Tamil Sita, attempt to protect their friend Rasa, a Tamil, from Black July (Sita is originally from Colombo, Rasa has moved from the Jaffna district in the North). Philip was Rasa's 'university room-mate in the mid-fifties and his good friend thereafter' (1990: 149). Rasa becomes a victim of a Sinhalese mob bent on retribution for LTTE actions because he refuses to camouflage his Tamil ethnicity. When the play opens, Philip and Sita are seen preparing to emigrate to Australia; they welcome Rasa and provide him with shelter from the violence. Outside their home, mobs are shouting as they, as stated in the play's stage directions, do their 'business of destruction and killing' (1990: 155). The first act contains a critical dialogue between the couple: Sita urges Philip to open up a conversation with Rasa about the ethnic tensions, which is reflected through an argument between the couple over the issue of the Tamil 'problem' in the country.

Philip: [. . .] Is your emphasis on the fact that we are married and have to live in the same home regardless of our positions on the Tamil question or is your emphasis on our rights to maintain our positions on the Tamil question regardless of its effect on our marriage? [original emphasis]

Sita: Putting it that way isn't helpful either, [. . .]

Macintyre writes, in a later reflection on the play, that,

The allegory becomes very pronounced towards the closing moments of the first act. The audience is conscious, that it is the Sinhalese and Tamil races they see, struggling on stage, to survive in their marriage to each other, within the same island.

(*The Muse*, Canberra as quoted in Macintyre, 1990: 151)

The second act begins with Rasa's arrival at Fernando's (Philip and Sita's) and his description of events outside. Despite Philip's unwillingness to send Rasa to a refugee camp, Rasa, escorted by two policemen, leaves of his own volition. He says:

I think I go to the refugee camp. From 1956 I have been given safety of your home at every riot. We have enjoyed drinking and talking of old times, till the next riot, and the next riot, and so on and so forth . . . and it became a . . . (he gestures a sense of futility) . . . today I think I'll cross over, to see what it is like on the other side.

(1990: 224)

Rasa's decision to 'cross over' is a denial of personal privileges owing to their friendship and granted by Philip and Sita to him. Rasa's departure is

significant, for, as portended in his police escort, he is killed by the mob. His killing is narrated to Sita when Philip, who has gone to the refugee camp to return the briefcase Rasa left, arrives back. Fraught, Philip reveals Rasa's death to Sita,

Sita listen,
 You listen to me carefully.
 Listen, how Rasa died.
 When I got there, he was already,
 A stiff burning log,
 On the ground.
 Just like a log, burning.
 And in the darkened street,
 There was no one else,
 Only I was there at his funeral pyre,
 No one else,
 His cremators had fled.

And as I turned around to return,
 After the pyre was spent,
 I saw a policeman, weeping, coming towards me.
 He told me it was not their fault,
 He told me they were blameless.
 That as they entered Madangahawatte lane,
 A huge mob confronted them,
 With the BUCKET held in front.
 The policeman walked quickly to Rasa's side,
 And stood confidently,
 Waiting for the question and answer.
 And the mob pointed to the bucket,
 And asked, "What is this"?

Rasa's chest heaved, a big heave,
 And the two policemen thought,
 He was preparing for the password, "BALDIYA"
 At the top of his heave,
 He slowly deflated,
 His head went limp,
 And bowed.

He didn't,
 He failed,
 To use his knowledge.
 The huge crowd went berserk,
 The policemen lost control,
 They clubbed him on the head,
 He fell.
 They poured the petrol,
 They struck the match,

The policeman, weeping, fled,
Back to his station.

He couldn't understand,
Why Rasa had DISHONOURED,
The contract

(1990: 233–234)

I quote this passage at length in order to illustrate not only the poetic power of MacIntyre's language,⁵ but also the coercion of one group of language speakers through linguistic discrimination, and how the materiality of the body is addressed as part of the apparatus of language.

Language matters

Language testing was used by mobs during Black July to identify Tamils. Sinhalese mobs tested Tamils' ability to speak in accurate Sinhalese, especially through the pronunciation of 'bucket'. The Sinhala word for 'bucket', 'baldiya' (/ba:ldijə/), beginning with the bilabial consonant /b/, was the 'password' for Tamil civilians. Unlike Sinhala, there is no /b/ in the Tamil alphabet. Tamils use the same letter to indicate the voiced bilabial stop and the voiceless stop sounds, and do not phonetically distinguish between the voiced and voiceless consonants, but depending on the position of the consonant, they vary the pronunciation. Although Rasa passed this test by accurately pronouncing it before coming to Philip's home, when Rasa goes to the refugee camp, he chose the Tamil pronunciation despite his ability to pronounce it in accurate Sinhala. In doing so, he deliberately identifies himself as Tamil and is killed. The apparatus is the division enacted around the performative utterance of an embodied linguistic ability and commitment – to choose or to refuse to speak a particular consonant. Tamils employ 'vaali' for the word 'bucket'. When Tamils use 'vaali' in Sinhalese, they pronounce it as 'vaaliya' (/va:lijə/). Philip later declares that this pronunciation is 'bastardis[ing] language' (1990: 194) and is a metaphor of illegitimacy. Although Tamils and Sinhalese are not confined to one geographical terrain, especially in Colombo, the refugee camp that Rasa intended to move into, indicates a geographical space that draws Rasa back in, linguistically.

One aim of racism is to separate people according to hierarchical population groups. As Foucault writes, hierarchies

allow power to treat population[s] as a mixture of races, or to be more accurate, to treat the species, to subdivide the species it controls, into the subspecies known, precisely, as races. That is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower.

(2003: 255)

Hierarchical divisions position and divest populations at lower class levels with little political dignity. But Rasa's active refusal to speak the bilabial stop, and his choice to die for it, indicates his political resistance and dignity. Rasa's death, however, provides testimony not only to a division among populations, but also

to how biological fragmentation is materialised and resisted through the linguistic diversities present in Tamil and Sinhalese populations. Rasa lets himself be captured by refusing to camouflage his Tamil identity. His choice to identify himself with his language is not unintentional; he is well-aware of its consequences. His choice is made through a realisation that his sense of subjugation is proportionate to the powerlessness of the language which has been his mother tongue for years.

MacIntyre's emphasis on the use of the term 'bucket' is also poignant. A 'bucket' is a vessel, often connoting emptiness as indicated through the phrases such as 'a drop in the bucket'. Buckets are also commonly used to collect waste. This nature between signifier and signified – the bucket and its connotations – is employed in demonstrating the extermination of Rasa, and his ethnic cleansing as a form of 'human waste'. Rasa's redundancy is further materialised as dispersed through the burning of his body; the displacement of his corpse is figuratively presented within the spoken text of the play as a 'stiff burning log'. As his body is removed allegorically from the scene, he is absented in being re-materialised, although he is wrapped up in other forms of embodiment such as fire and the log. Rasa, the person, rather than simply the population as such, becomes the biopolitical victim.

Foucault's emphasis on how biopolitics functions as a form wherein life and death become circumscribed in a means of governance is pertinent. Biopolitics appears in two basic forms, as 'anatomy-politics of the human body' and as strata-gems which 'foster[s] life or disallow it to the point of death' (1990: 138–139). The first is centred on the body as a machine and focuses on discipline, practised as apparatuses through confinement of bodies within institutions. The latter does not focus on individuals but populations as 'species' – 'control over relations between the human race, or human beings as species, and their environment, the milieu in which they live' (2003: 245). Foucault further calls this second form 'a "biopolitics" of the human race' (2003: 243), which seeks to regulate populations as a whole, while being controlled by political sovereignty. The state-deployed linguistic Swabhasha policy not only regulated the individuals and 'species', but culminated in torture and death: it becomes biopolitical as power over a group of populations, but whose effect is felt, in the context of the play, also in the specific aesthetic and person of Rasa.

It is necessary here to refer to the dialogue between Philip and Rasa (before Rasa's departure to the refugee camp), to discuss the biopolitical implications of Rasa's death. Philip recalls how Rasa has frequently sought refuge due to the continuous history of ethnic riots in postcolonial Sri Lanka since the 1950s; Philip recites the dates: '56, '58, '61, '74, '77 '81' (1990: 162). Philip also recounts how Rasa was given protection from a 'gang – of seniors' at the university in the mid-1950s. Sita too recalls that in 1961 she 'had to tell the thug at the gate that there were no Tamils in the house, at the very moment that Rasanayagam was under the bed here' (1990: 157). Rasa rhetorically asks: 'who would have thought that you'll have to tell the same lie for me so many times in our history?' (1990: 157). Evidently, Rasa's body has long been subjected to acts of violence and subjugation. Beginning with an act of ragging (bullying) at the university where violence was inflicted as amusement, his body has intermittently been subjected to mobs' gaze and imposition. Rasa's tragedy – his death and prior subjection to fear since

the 1950s – is an example both of perpetrated material and psychological violence on civilians manifested through an embodied, reinforced, and resistant language, and the way in which language functions as a legitimising apparatus to cleanse populations. Rasa's is also a specific, personalised, emotional loss.

Killing populations

Rasa's killing exemplifies the state's complicity in the extra-legal praxis; Rasa is killed by a mob armed with clubs, petrol, and matches in the presence of two policemen. The historian Cooray (2002) reminds us that the state police were powerless during the Black July riots. This is dramatically represented by MacIntyre when the policemen's expectations are shattered as Rasa heaves to utter the password and then fails. The mobs' 'business of destruction and killing' reworks the population into commodities and implies killing as a state condoned industry networked by hierarchical apparatuses and politically profitable.

Qadri Ismail (2005: 218–219) suggests in his analysis of MacIntyre's play that Rasa's choice to open himself to be killed – literally via his deliberate misvoicing – deserves further attention. Although the policeman could not understand '[w]hy Rasa has DISHONOURED' the contract, Rasa's gesture of 'futility' before his departure, suggests that he is ultimately refusing to live in disguise during the riots. In the opening dialogue between Rasa and Philip, Rasa says that 'Sri Lankan Tamil culture belongs in Sri Lanka', not to Tamil Nadu (the state in India, literally meaning 'the land of Tamils'), but 'pressure is applied to that culture by the Sinhalese' (1990: 219). This pressure ultimately induced Rasa to make decisions about being with other 'unprotected' Tamils. Before extending his wishes to the couple for their emigration, Rasa's last words on-stage allude to pressures on the Tamils to disguise themselves: "[w]hat about the people burning on the streets? They took no public political decisions. They didn't even deliberately choose to be Tamils. Many of them must have tried to pass off as Sinhalese" (1990: 225). Rasa chooses suicide in a dramatic gesture of solidarity both with Tamil citizens who have been subjugated and dehumanised, and with the Tamil language, which has been effectively exempted from state franchise.

The mob attack is not a crime committed directly by the state to bring law and order in the country. To identify Tamil residents, mobs found documentation containing the names and addresses of voters, information which is usually kept under the control of the state. Evidently, these mobs received access to such documentation through links with the state. As the play's narrative develops, we see political prisoners in jail attacked and killed, despite the assumption that a prison is typically a place where state security is high. Rasa is killed in the presence of two policemen. These instances illustrate how the mob violence is introduced as a 'business' of extermination, and suggest that mob violence is influenced and supported by powerful political forces. Rasa's death is a function of biopolitics, is enabled by state-sanctioned linguistic regulations, yet, almost ironically, is chosen in deliberate resistance as contingent embodiment.

Human Rights Watch named Black July as 'state sponsored' rioting (Imtiyaz and Stavis, 2008: 9), and the play reflects this judgment, for instance, in the killing

of political prisoners. It is also reflected in Cooray's observation of the 'organized' crowd at the cemetery and his warning of a riot. In Rasa's initial description of the mobs before his departure to the refugee camp, he reveals that the crowd gathered at the cemetery, 'seem to be opposed to a state funeral' (1990: 190) because they want 'to hand the [soldiers'] bodies over to the next of kin' (1990: 190). Rasa observes that the 'crowds are violently filling up the graves with sand, to prevent the burials' (1990: 189). Although inspired by the denial of funeral customs, the play alludes to Cooray's reference to the organised crowd and political unscrupulousness. Ironically, Rasa's 'funeral pyre' is attended by Philip alone; even the 'cremators had fled'. All these instances point to a process of corruption whereby biopolitical imaginaries induce forms of legitimised violence implicitly or explicitly condoned by the state hegemonies, and become inserted into cycles of retribution and counter-retribution, yet are felt and narrated as intimate material imbrications: bilabial stops, buckets, burned logs, graves.

The play's epilogue mirrors this dance and counter-dance of death. In a similar fashion to Rasa's death, the epilogue depicts massacres committed by the LTTE against Sinhalese civilians. While Philip and Sita are seen waiting at Singapore airport on their passage to Australia, the news of Sinhalese civilians' deaths are read out across Philip's newspaper: 'Tamil Terrorists kill 150, wound 300, in ATTACK ON DEFENCELESS SINHALESE PEASANTS' (1990: 236). How Sinhalese civilians become targets of the LTTE attacks and oppression, and also susceptible to torture and violence, is evident. Despite Rasa's death, the epilogue is a pointed anti-climax. One may argue that what Macintyre attempts here is to follow the regulations of a well-made play. The epilogue is the playwright's attempt to 'present the "other side" of the conflict, the atrocities committed by the Tamil militants to counteract the play's depiction of the brutality of the Sinhalese during the 1983 riots' (Neluka Silva 2008: 10). But the massacre of Tamil civilians by Sinhalese mobs, and the execution of Sinhalese civilians by the LTTE demonstrate the intensity and extent of violence related to the conditions set in motion by biopolitical imaginaries.

Foucault theorises the killing of populations: he shows how war is waged not only on 'one's adversaries', but also on one's citizens. He argues that 'war is [. . .] not simply a matter of destroying a political adversary, but of destroying the enemy race' (2003: 257). We can argue that the LTTE aims to kill not only the soldiers who confront them in battle, but also to eliminate the enemy as racial category. A comparative link can be drawn between the LTTE and the Sinhalese mobs: each desires the other's elimination.

Distancing materialities

Although the play is about generalised extermination and intimate destruction, Macintyre does not situate dead bodies on-stage. By removing the body from the stage, the materiality of death and other experiences of violence are removed, even from off-stage narrativisation (as in the case of Rasa's body being represented and narrated by Philip as a log). This dematerialisation of the body is taken further in the narrative as death is announced and recounted through distancing

material assemblages or apparatuses: the telephone, the BBC news, and the Singapore newspaper.

Cynthia – Sita's friend and wife of Anton, the DIG (Deputy Inspector General of Police) – telephones to give updates on the violence in Colombo, information she holds thanks to her husband's position. It is only through the ringing of the phone followed by Sita's exclamatory responses and revelation to Philip that the audience comes to know of the brutality and material destruction caused by the riot:

(The phone rings, SITA picks it up)

Yes. . . . ah. . . . hr. . . . hr. . . . hr. . . . hr. . . . finished . . . hr. . . . hr. . . .
 nopolice . . . hr. . . . thanks. . . . keep us informed . . . ah. ah. . . .
 thanks. . . . (Now to Philip) MYSORE CAFÉ – GONE – CYNTHIA! (Like
 reading telegram).

(1990: 164–165)

As Silva writes, '[t]he increasing intensity of the riots in *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* is mapped through a series of telephone calls, the Fernandos' link with the world outside' (2008: 3–4). MacIntyre relies on narrativisation to demonstrate embodied experiences because both an explicit and direct representation of embodied violence in a moment of war is problematic and difficult to stage, and because the play is a reflection on the apparatuses through which violence is perpetrated, legitimised, and itself staged. State violence is theatre made possible by numerous interdependent and sometimes conflicting discourses.

For instance, through the BBC, all three characters become preoccupied with ethnic violence. The BBC itself functions as a biopolitical trajectory in regulating the three characters emotionally. In the second act, before Rasa's departure to the camp, 'the internationally recognized signature tune of the [BBC] joins the action, sharp and loud, coming from the direction of PHILIP's room' (1990: 214). Philip 'emerges, carrying the radio', and explains how the BBC has explicitly revealed the violence including the killing and massacre of political prisoners in jail by mobs (1990: 214). Rasa's Tamil friend, Dr Rajasunderam, who is currently in jail having been 'arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, but only for leading a demonstration' (1990: 215), is among the dead. This is confirmed through Cynthia's telephone calls. Rasa's gestures too – he 'remains seated, head down' (1990: 221), 'limp in his chair' (1990: 223) – demonstrate his emotional change, desolate and lifeless, presaging his death, and signifying the coercion of the BBC reporting and its power as a biopolitical apparatus to communicate and legitimise categories mobilised in and as violence. Rasa's despairing inquiry – 'how could this have happened inside a government prison' (1990: 222) – foregrounds the complicity of security forces and leads the audience to contemplate the precarity of, and trust placed in, biopolitical apparatuses like the state, law, and security.

The failure and precarity of law is conceptualised by Agamben. In contemporary politics, what he terms a state of exception is employed as the 'dominant paradigm' in maintaining political sovereignty (Agamben, 2005: 2). By referring to the politicisation of life and the logic of sovereignty, 'full powers' alludes to the

'the expansion of the powers of the government', especially the power 'to issue decrees having the force of law' and characterises the state of exception as acting outside of, or in spite of the law for a perceived public good (2005: 5). The mob's attack on the prison, where 'political activists' (1990: 222) like Dr Rajasunderam are incarcerated, provides an example of the 'expansion' and failures, in other words, the precarities, of the state's powers. Following Agamben, people, like Dr Rajasunderam and Rasa, indeed, everyone, is 'included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion' (1998: 11). Rajasunderam, Rasa, Philip, Sita, the audience – all of us – are products within an apparatus, whether linguistic, economic, political, and aesthetic, that includes and renders potential through its exclusions.

MacIntyre shows the 'sharp' international intervention, as revealed through Philip's criticism of the BBC's explicit reporting: the BBC plays 'a jaunty' tune telling the 'whole world our agonies' by 'hover[ing] high above us, like carrion, [. . .] look[ing] down upon' Sri Lanka when the country is 'being torn apart'. The BBC reports the violence 'wholesale' (1990: 217): 'this kind of publicity is not reporting history, it adds to history by creating further division in the country' (1990: 216). Philip believes that the BBC is 'gloating' and thus making the situation 'worse' (1990: 215), as it is 'not woven into [Sri Lankans'] social fabric': '[o]ur own media is our society' (1990: 217). MacIntyre means this literally. The social is a product of how language is embodied as the distributed body made politic. The BBC's report is an apposite case in point: '[w]ithin one afternoon and part of a night, the physical division of Sri Lanka has occurred in the minds of the people' (1990: 216). The BBC plays a dual role of revealing a truth and making the situation worse through biopolitical constructs implicitly mobilised as information and truth-telling. Media publicise threats and propagate fear; while they focus on relatively rare violent acts, they also largely neglect structural, conditioning aspects of the first world. Violence and terror come to regulate human life in both the emotional and physical dimensions of the lived and represented body. It brutalises people while destabilising and restabilising social orders. Philip states:

in twenty seven years this is the first time this has taken the lead over all other world news, just shows how the Tamil lobby has grown, it is they who are using the BBC [. . .] it's the international Tamil lobby that's doing all the damage!

(1990: 215–216)

It is typical that narratives of war and genocide have representational limitations because they cannot be omniscient observers. Philip's statement prompts us to ask whether the BBC provides only a one-sided picture of the tension by favouring the 'International Tamil lobby', and complicates the image of a colonial legacy in the country and of its continuing legacies of global coercion. As Ann Laura Stoler (2008) argues, '

[t]o speak of colonial ruination is to trace the fragile and durable substance and signs, the visible and visceral senses in which the effects of empire are

reactivated and remain. [. . .] It is also a political project that lays waste to certain peoples and places, relations, and things. To think with ruins of empire is to emphasise less the artifacts of empire as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime than to attend to their reappropriations and strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present.

(2008: 196)

Central to Stoler's (2008) argument is the distinction between ruin and ruination: ruins are the vestiges of imperial pasts; ruination entails 'what people are "left with"' (2008: 194). Ruination is alive and active in the present, and appears both in physical ruins and in mindscapes. Ruination does not end with independence granted by the colonised nations, but may continue to exist violently as implied through the 'vibrantly violent verb' – 'ruin' (2008: 194). Colonial processes of ruination leave their 'material and mental marks' and continue destroying post-colonised nations (2008: 204).

Stoler's reading can be linked to the representation of the BBC news. The play's use of strategies (narrated violence, off-stage sound, telephone conversation, newspaper headlines, etc.) to represent violence through the BBC is a portrayal of the invisible presence of the colonial legacy and the apparatus of its global transnationality today. Colonial processes are immanent within the social and political logics of postcolonial Sri Lanka, and they constitute the regulation of internal political legitimacies in postcolonial nations. The characterisation of the BBC in the play functions to highlight how a transnational biopolitical apparatus linguistically manipulates and affectually regulates human beings emotionally and corporeally. It represents both how political tensions between human life and apparatuses are produced and heightened, and how dislocated transnational grammars fuel pressures between ethnic groups initiated partly due to colonial legacies and linguistic cartographies. The way the three characters are shaken and their actions shaped by the BBC's 'triumphant' reporting of the violence reflects how pervasively mediated apparatuses intervene as languages for living and dying, and so symbolise how colonial ruins return within postcolonial populations.

English-speaking elite: 'Irrelevant to this country?'

Tensions between human life and colonial apparatuses of language are further rendered visible through the play's representation of Philip, Rasa and Sita as English-speaking elites. English was introduced to Sri Lanka through British colonialism, and the play is, more broadly, a critique of Anglophone middle-class elite attitudes. But it also problematises how, as a colonial language, English marginalises elites from national and postcolonial concerns.

While describing the catastrophic situation of Black July, Rasa, paradoxically, also happily adds: 'I didn't know how long it would be this time, so I put in a few extra bottles [alcohol]. As soon as I got the first wind of this [riots], I rushed to Victoria Stores and got an ample quota' (1990: 189). Rasa's preparation implies that he has been trying to celebrate Black July: both Philip and Rasa have enjoyed the riots in the past, such events represent an opportunity to spend time discussing

their university days over drinks during the relative peace of government-imposed curfews. Despite the cataclysm, the riots have been anticipated occasions for these two representatives of ethnic difference. Both Philip and Rasa believe that talk of current ethnic violence is not necessary; theirs is a strong friendship that 'transcends' Sinhala-Tamil politics (1990: 178). Yet their equanimity represents the English-speaking elites' poor grasp of the strength of the ethnic tensions surrounding them; happy meetings during the previous riots and their unwillingness to open a dialogue of ethnic pressures at personal level signifies political and cultural blindness, as well as their ambivalence towards, and detachment from, national issues. English, the preferred mode of class-bound communication, functions as an apparatus that marginalises them from national concerns regarding the ethnicised division of indigenous languages, and their associated linguistic cartographies in postcolonial Sri Lanka. Sita admits:

I have never taken an interest in the language policy, the colonization schemes, the university admissions system, the employment ratios in the public service, Tamil kingdoms of the past, and the so-called traditional homelands and all that kind of thing. I have no feel for these things.

(1990: 170)

Sita is politically blind to the language issue and the ensuing ethnic violence manifest through language divisions. Her almost wilful blindness is due to the coercive position of English-speakers in regulating governmental attitudes. Such regulation manifests a subtle and affective biopolitical register in shaping embodied and emotional responses to violence, and by those excluded by linguistic elitism and ambivalence. Sita confirms this reading of language as both regulatory and affective when she remarks: '[B]eing of the English speaking middle classes is like being irrelevant to this country . . . I hope it's a false perspective, but the heightening of things has certainly produced that feeling' (1990: 171).

A retired university lecturer of English literature, Sita pours out her inner feelings towards the political scenario: 'the state is in default of its duties to its Tamil citizens, when it expects its citizens to hide their identity inside a bucket, to be able to remain alive' (1990: 230). She opens up a relatively critical dialogue about ethnic tensions, winning over Philip and Rasa's reticence. She manifests disgust at belonging to the English-speaking middle-class (1990: 171) while being married to a Sinhalese, and not belonging to the majority Tamil population: 'I was only a nominal Tamil' (1990: 167). Her emotional and despairing voice resists the violence exerted on the bodies of Tamil populations. As Ismail asserts, Sita happens to be the 'most significant actant' in the play (2005: 212).

Sita becomes proactive about the racial and ethnic tensions embodied by the riot only after she is hurt personally in two particular instances. The first reckoning occurs to her at an Old Girls Association meeting during which she was excluded and ostracised from the discussion about the burning of the Jaffna library because she was married to a Sinhalese man.⁶ The second instance occurred when her colleague induces her to question her own inability to use the Tamil language. Sita starts to self-question her linguistic place and marital status only after her

exclusion and failure to conform to ethnic and social expectations: she had been politically blind to the ethnic riots and 'national level' (1990: 165) politics until she became personally affected by them. In both these instances, language intervenes as a qualifier of biological life: she crossed the Tamil-Sinhala boundary by marrying a Sinhalese and becomes a political victim of ostracism. Sita's distance from the language she is biopolitically and ethnically bound to renders her a social victim, or even waste. Her link with the colonial language leads her to become 'irrelevant' to the country's politics and national issues. Sita's life is subjugated within the colonial linguistic apparatuses, but in different ways than Rasa's.

Macintyre reflected that '[t]he middle classes is [sic] the class that I know. I could never write of the village people because I am not able to write about them' (as quoted in Athique 2006: 184). He refers specifically to the educated, English-speaking middle-class people living in cities, especially in Colombo. Hence, the play is a critique of the Anglophone elite's attitudes towards ethnic tensions. As Imtiyaz and Stavis write, '[n]either the Sinhala ruling elite nor state institutions openly condemned or took any meaningful immediate measures to prevent the violence against the Tamil civilians from spreading to the other parts of the island from Colombo' (2008: 10).

The ignorance of the Anglophone elite's involvement toward national concerns has led the country to a desperate situation, as indicated through the play's title 'last riot': The multiple connotations of 'last riot' complicate death, and encourage scrutiny of the processes by which living bodies become dead bodies due to the political conditions. This is Rasa's last riot with the Fernando family because they are due to emigrate to Australia; it is also, of course, Rasa's last riot as he is killed. The word 'last' is significant because after this crucial riot when many others died, the country underwent civil war for almost 30 years. This is the beginning of the civil war and the end of minor riots. 'Last' demonstrates that the elite's response to, and production within, linguistic and ethnic division is too late. As Rasa pronounces,

([u]ttering his thesis as obliquely as possible) From 1956 it has been slowly coming to this. [. . .] The next stage has to be a war between the Sri Lankan army and the armies of the Tamils. It is the last riot.

(1990: 214)

The title signifies the peak of embodied experience: brutality, violence, massacres, and a future war which engulfed the country. Rasa is a soothsayer for the country. He resembles Cassandra in *The Aeneid* (Virgil, 1990) as she prophesies the downfall of Troy.

Conclusion

In the last scene, when Philip remarks to Sita that many Sinhalese expect Tamils to 'take an accommodating position', Sita, by '[s]miling warmly at him', responds not to expect it from her. She reiterates that 'there must be something called a Sri Lankan' (1990: 238); she intimates towards unity on a personal,

but metaphorically, also a national level. Echoing Sita's optimism about Tamil and Sinhala speakers' unity, Sri Lanka amended its language policy providing the equitable use of Sinhala and Tamil languages in all areas in the country. For instance, as the thirteenth amendment of the Constitution (1987) mandates, the national languages (Sinhalese and Tamil) are used as the medium of instructions in the (state-run) school curriculum: English is taught as a Second Language while Sinhala and Tamil is taught as the 'Second National Language'.⁷ Moreover, the sixteenth amendment to the Constitution certified in 1988 made Sinhala and Tamil as the languages of Courts and the languages of Administration, while an officer is required to pass an examination in the second language before 'promotion' – 'the 2nd Language will be Tamil for a Sinhalese Officer and Sinhala for a Tamil Officer'⁸ These provide evidence to the attempts taken to recognise the limitation in the language policies as biopolitical apparatuses in the country and rectify them.

Nonetheless, it is commonly observed, in the 2000s, that a high minority of Sri Lankans are capable of understanding and communicating in both national languages. Sasanka Perera's (2011) research conclusion made in 2010 – '[w]hile government circulars received by this office as a rule come in all three languages and sometimes in two, a great majority of routine communication from government agencies continues to be in Sinhala' [original emphasis] – also implies the extent to which the language policies have been ineffective and the strong negative repercussions of the Swabhasha policy as legacies of colonialism. What is required is a further critical reflection on colonial embodiment in postcolonial territories. This embodiment needs to realise its imbricated agency within material apparatuses that make possible biopolitical and intimate violences, and their resistance.

My critical analysis of the intervention of ethno-linguistic cartographies in regulating human life, as represented in *Rasanayagam's Last Riot*, highlights how, in postcolonial contexts, bodies, as distributed forms of embodiment and dissociation, become enrolled in, and produced by regulatory, colonial apparatuses. Resistances too, of course, also take the form of dispersed yet embodied agencies, however subtle and with whatever devastating consequences: the refusal to speak despite knowing and performing differences in pronunciation; dissociative alliances with and against objects like lips and buckets; colonial ruins and their return as ongoing ruination; and, transnational media forms, including aurally and visually embodied, yet distancing technologies like telephones and newspapers. These, also enhanced and amplified representationally as off-stage narration devices, performatively denote how embodied forms of coercion and colonial ruination signify the 'relentless fight' and constitutive tension between life and apparatus. Distinctions between biological existence (zoe) and the political life (bios) of human beings are produced in exposing bare life to the brutalities qualifies bios. Life becomes wedged between the state of exception and the target of violence; life as de-territorialised force is simultaneously set outside the domain of the political, but nevertheless implicated and subjected to politics as a force to be contained and managed. In Sri Lanka, this status is a result of a biopolitical continuum, particularly experienced by postcolonial subjects since colonisation

through state-bound imbrications of linguistic and non-linguistic apparatuses. It is important to articulate new critical postcolonial perceptions of how biopolitical processes transform subjects. Reading the colonial past and representing its ruination in the postcolonial present calls for novel ways to understand the status of the postcolonial, the tensions between apparatuses as productive of human beings, and the resultant reflections on the effects and sites of biopolitics.

Notes

- 1 The 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka states that '[t]he Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala' and '[t]he National Languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil': it adds that '[a] person shall be entitled to be educated through the medium of either of the National Languages'. The thirteenth amendment of this constitution which was certified in 1987 states 'to make Tamil an official language and English the link language'. See 'The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka' and 'Amendments to the 1978 Constitution'.
- 2 The Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, certified in 1958, states the following amendments: a Tamil pupil is 'entitled to be instructed through the medium of the Tamil language'; a person educated through Tamil medium is 'entitled to be examined through such medium at any examination for the admission of [. . .] the Public Service, and the Tamil Language shall be made a medium of instructions for University education for those who have been educated through Tamil Language prior to university admission. See 'Sri Lanka's Laws: Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act', 1958.
- 3 According to Sri Lankan funeral customs, death ceremonies are highly elaborate and conducted by the family members; whether to bury or cremate the deceased is also usually decided according to traditional family customs.
- 4 MacIntyre's nationality is stated as 'Sri Lankan': his middle name, 'Thalayasingam', signifies his Tamil ethnicity.
- 5 What is explicit here is MacIntyre's skill in expressing a tense movement of dialogue within the play poetically: this recalls Berthold Brecht's alienation effects (1964).
- 6 The Jaffna library was burned during communal violence in 1981. Its destruction was a brutal instance of ethnic-biblioclasm.
- 7 See 'Way Forward of Bilingual Education Programmes in Trilingual Sri Lanka'
- 8 See 'The Gazette [sic] of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka'

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