Dog-killings as Anti-colonial Resistance in Contemporary Fiction of the Global South

Vihanga Perera

University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

Introduction

In a host of postcolonial novels from the global south the killing of dogs owned by the dominant social class is presented as an expression of local protest against the prevailing order. Acclaimed writing from a broad spectrum from South Africa to Sri Lanka, and from India to the West Indian diaspora, as seen in the work of J M Coetzee (1999), Chitra Fernando (1999), Kiran Desai (2004), Monique Roffey (2009), Hebe De Souza (2016), and Tishani Doshi (2019), have produced notable representations of this kind. They frame premeditated harm on animals belonging to elite households as the political response of a "new country" where a new political order struggles to break through the prevailing hegemony. These situations often call to attention what the Italian social thinker Antonio Gramsci defined as an "interregnum" where an arrangement of hegemony deteriorated prior to the full emergence of another (Gramsci 276). In these situations, collectives and groups of upwardly mobile society that were historically suppressed from politico-economic participation are seen to mobilize and – at varying levels – to undermine the status quo. In the works of fiction identified above, such groups bring harm on pedigree-dogs of social elites through their being stolen (Desai 283, 288-290), poisoned (Doshi 156-158, 187; Roffey 394-395, 404), decapitated (Wa Thiong'o 213), and slaughtered (Coetzee 95).

Attacks on canines appear to express class-hostility where the aggressor identifies in the dog a substitution for its master; and, in harming the animal, a way of delivering a threat to the superior class. At one level, such activism underlines a reversal of a long history of colonial violence where dogs (and other animals) owned by colonizers were used as instruments to control local populations. This is seen in the use of trained dogs to track locals/natives, their use in forensic teams, and the use of dogs in colonial sport. In parallel, certain European canine breeds were popularized at the expense of local varieties on which government placed taxes and bans (Jayawardena 101). The disparity between European pedigrees and local breeds, in instances, was seen as a mirror to the native-colonial power difference: an aspect Sri Lankan novelist Chitra Fernando traced in her novel *Cousins* (81-82) set in the 1960s.

The present examination focuses on literary representations of dog-killings as a postcolonial expression resurgent from communities with histories of colonial land-grab. It understands dog-killings as activism and political expression where the act of slaughter (of dogs) brings on a "new language" used by "new men": men who were responding to a historical moment ripe with opportunity to overthrow the yoke of oppression. Such actions, as Jean-Paul Sartre has observed, implicate a people's bid to advance a "new humanity" that was crucial to political struggle and whose energy lay in "constantly renewed aggressions" (qtd. in Fanon 17). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon justifies revolutionary violence as the inevitable consequence of colonialism and its exploitation of colonized natives. He viewed in revolutionary violence the power for colonized natives to foster a consciousness as a people and "recreate themselves in the image of a new humanity forged from the experience of liberation" (Sartre qtd. in Fanon iv): a "redemptive promise", as Nicolas De Warren reflects, in the "recreation of humanity" for which a national consciousness and a revolutionary culture were equally relevant (De Warren 1) to advocate "social structure being changed from the bottom up" (Fanon 35). The expressions of violence in the present discussion are often foregrounded at the intersection of the ideas Fanon, Gramsci, and Sartre have proposed in relation to a country's history posed between two paradigms. In moving the discussion forward with insights on the triangulation between history, transition in political orders, and the expression of protest (through violence), the present study anchors on three recent novels of acclaim: Chitra Fernando's *Cousins*, J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.

I

In its association with authority and power, the European dog has a powerful signification in narratives of empire. It constitutes a deeply etched animate form of violence – a violence that was raw, urgent, and brutal in the collective historical consciousness of the colony. The threatening presence of such dogs manifested in stories of adventure and conquest attest to trained breeds being used in home security, tracking, and in hunting. Colonialism's cultural and economic appropriation of territories of Africa, Asia, and the Americas laid the foundation for the continuing dependence of these countries on industrial nations – as Walter Rodney has argued – to normalize a trade culture to the advantage of Europe's development (Rodney 85-105). In these expansive ventures benefiting European capitalism, the dog was for the "white pioneer" a best companion as seen in adventure stories from Jack London's *White Fang* to Lee Falk's popular *Phantom* comic series (where a mysterious white man believed to be indomitable,

ageless, peerless, with the wisdom of four hundred years rules over a territory with tribes of black men with a wolf/dog for companion). Dogs of ferocious ability – particularly, a certain Cuban breed – were popular among European adventurers who fought the Maroon tribes of Jamaica (Parry and Yingling 69) while, to bring them under control, plantation owners set dogs on revolting slaves (71). At another point, colonialism worked on the myth that local cultures in Africa and Asia were "lagging behind" in development and progress (Shadle 1097); that made the aim to "civilize natives" according to European standards (Louw 175) a pronounced aim of colonial enterprises. Narratives framed by colonial prejudice normally imposed a binary between the "primitive" and "civilized" that reduced local communities to stereotypical readings.[1] For colonialism, Fanon writes, the "vast [African] continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism […] a country of cannibals" (Fanon 211) by which the beast and the native were placed in adjacent positions on a spectrum of primitivism and at a remove from the enlightenment values that supposedly defined industrial Europe.

The perceived approximation between beast and colonized (as savage) is notable in cultural expressions such as "pariah dog": a term widespread in the British Raj in India and Sri Lanka. Pratik Chakrabarti observes how colonial discourse normalized the calling of local street-mongrels as "pariahs" after a socially marginalized caste in the country's south (130). As a result of western influence, practices comparable to the above were conveyed as far as the Japanese archipelago (Skabelund 18-19). There pariah dogs, however, were used in colonial sport by colonials who released their pure-bred stock during hunting expeditions (Chakrabarti 130). The African counterpart of this violent belief can be traced to South Africa where, in Gabeba Baderoon's findings, the Africanis, boer-honds, and ridgebacks were divided as "black" and "white" breeds in what Baderoon identified as the nineteenth century's "racialized South African imaginary" (346).[2]

At the level of colonial institutional policy, taxes imposed on local breeds negatively impacted native production chains and the subsistence of hunting communities in both Africa and Asia. One of its far-reaching outcomes seems to be the gradual elimination of local hounds. Often, legislation against local breeds – as in the case of Transkei, in South Africa – was issued under the pretext of safeguarding "local flora and fauna" from "abuse and destruction" (Tropp 451). Locally owned dogs, as in reports from the Eastern Cape, were categorized as "vermin"; locals found in forests were prosecuted and their dogs killed (459) although colonial sport was exempted from all such legislation (451-452). With time, colonies such as Palestine, Egypt, and Ceylon became test centers of the British Home Office in early experiments using dogs for crime control and, to the British forensic laboratories of the 1930s, a trial ground in using trained dogs

in forensic work (Blum 623). In Kenya, Kikuyu and Sudanese trackers were used alongside trained dogs to form "tracker combat teams" specialized in "deep penetration tactics" (Blum 637). In South Africa, the Natal Police took a certain pride in a specialized dog-training facility – reportedly the only one of its kind in 1929 – with an eighteen-month course that trained dogs to track natives (630).

To conclude this overview of the use of dogs in colonial culture a brief note has to be made of the spread of Victorian morality, values, and mores in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Victorian bias for "pure-breeds" (as opposed to "mongrels" and "half-breeds") was normalized in the colonies as an extension of the colonial gaze. Chakrabarti concedes that the Indian Cruelty Acts were not merely local variants of contemporaneous British legislation but "reflections of British perceptions of Indian character and society" (130). These attitudes, in turn, shaped social institutions and informed the moral character of the local bourgeoisie who, for over two centuries, followed the British colonial masters. For locals who were dominated and dispossessed by government, the dog – as often reflected in the literatures of post-colonial expression – became, by itself, an oppressive symbol of European colonialism (Blum 635). This is powerfully captured by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa' Thiong'o in his novel *The Grain of Wheat* (1967) through Koina, a youth caught between the dispossession, hunger, and poverty of the rural peasantry and the luxuries his British employee, Dr. Lynd, provided her pet dog. Notwithstanding the mistress's goodwill and generosity, Koina leads two men to loot Dr. Lynd's house (wa' Thiong'o 213). While the petrified mistress watched, Koina hacked the pet dog that was normally left in his care, and which he had come to like, to death (213). Resonant of Sartre (cited at the outset), this brutal killing coincides with the emergence in Koina of a "new man": one who left behind a life lived in oppression and, as a rebel in the Mau Mau rebellion, took on a role in the fight for a "new country."

J M Coetzee's award-winning novel *Disgrace* represents a complex moment in a transitional South Africa between its Apartheid past and emergence as a "new country." The novel covers several months in the life of a Cape Town English Professor, David Lurie, who – after a scandal in the workplace – withdraws to a remote farm house on the Eastern Cape owned by his daughter, Lucy. David soon becomes a part of farm life but grows anxious for his daughter's safety in a country that appeared to have become increasingly intolerant of whites (Coetzee 60). On her farm, Lucy kept a kennel of a dozen dogs for her safety. She also depended on the support of her black neighbour, Petrus, a former servant who had now become a landowner in the "new country." A key passage in the novel is set around an intrusion on Lucy's house by three local (black) men who loot and gang-rape Lucy before making away in David's vehicle (91-97). The intruders shoot

and kill the dogs in the kennel using Lucy's gun (95). Coetzee describes the shooting incident in graphic detail where the killer coolly picks target in even composure. Salem, in South Africa's Eastern Cape, where Lucy's farm was located, was a historical trauma-site of frontier wars in the nineteenth century between British settlers and the Xhosa people (Marais 36). Throughout the novel, echoes of this violent frontier history are revived; David thought of Lucy as "a frontier farmer of the new breed" that had replaced the traditional "cattle and maize" with "dogs and daffodils" (Coetzee 62) in a world where guns, electric fences, and dogs continued to give whites the illusion of safety against black locals (Herron 472).

In Lucy being raped and her dogs being killed at point blank range one observes a cold-bloodedness quite different from instances in Monique Roffey's *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* (Roffey 404) and Tishani Doshi's *Small Days and Nights* (Doshi 142-143) where dogs were killed as a "warning sign" for their owners. To understand the implications of Lucy's rape and the slaughtering of the kennel one has to overreach the logic and social safeguards of an ordinary world and be receptive to a country plagued by historical trauma undergoing urgent transformation. The violence in question demonstrates the reasserting boundaries of the provincial realpolitik whereby men such as Petrus (previously the field hand for the white master) are now patrons to the local community with increasing clout and influence. His self-reference to being "the dog man" (Coetzee 64) almost mocks the decline of the colonial order in a world where he slowly but steadily has become the owner of labour and production. The dog-imagery in Disgrace draws attention to the friction within layers of an oppressive racialized hierarchy that, after centuries of European colonial rule, was being dismantled and in the process of being supplanted by a new order. In this emerging world, the "pecking order" had changed; the former master's offspring was now at the receiving end of being treated "like a dog" (205). To Jane Poyner, this transformation indicates "the climax of [the] dissipation of white ownership" (Poyner 72) in societies like South Africa where inter-racial relations were tied up to "retaliatory violence as a form of national business" (Barney 525).

This inescapability from violence in the interregnum is itself a historical condition Lucy seems to accept, which is demonstrated in her seemingly passive and resigned reaction to her rape, a response critics have identified as an acceptance, in a "new South Africa," of "[white] peripherality" and "historical responsibility for apartheid" (Marais 32). The malice and satisfaction behind the act of the dog-killings is a further demonstration of the violent enforcement of peripherality in a symbolic "reversal" of history that aims to release the agent from piled up legacies of forced silences, evictions, deportations, dismantling of communities, and organized erasure. As

representation, it performs in reversal the violence unleashed on local communities by settlers and the blood-letting during takeovers where both animals and peasants were killed side by side (Hagen 9-10). Of this, perhaps, Catherine Buckle's *Innocent Victims* (2009) is a compelling narrative from post-independence Zimbabwe in which the slaughtering, starving, and hamstringing of animals has been understood as an alternative for homicide (Wylie 189) whereby slaughtered animals were considered "bodily surrogates" for dispossessed farmers (189). The unwritten histories over which the ancestors of the dominant social class exerted control cannot be fully accounted for or be framed in conventional terms as narrative (Rodney 96-100). At one level, the violence encoded in the native resurgence suggests a largely bio-political mechanism of coping with one's ruptured collective memory. Unacceptable to, and condemned by, (European/colonial) codes of "civilized conduct", the appropriation of Lucy's body in her assailants' hands redefines protest by the historically dispossessed on the very civilization that violated its lands and ancestors. Lucy's seemingly passive response to her trauma, her resignation in bearing the child of her rapist, and her placid agreement to a marriage to Petrus (as his third wife) suggest the perversity and lack of fairness awaiting colonial descendants – newly disenfranchised of privilege and historical immunity – as they reorient in the "new country." In genealogical terms, the violent hybridity of the child growing in Lucy's womb is symbolic of Lucy's legacy and heritage for the dispossessed elites of the new world.

II

The symbolic implications in the traumatic legacies of Lucy's bodily violation, discussed above, echo in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, a novel set in the Indian-Nepali border zone at a time of Gurkha nationalist uprisings in the mid-1980s. The story concerns the elite household of Jemubhai Patel, a retired judge, who, in his "*obsessive pursuit* of so-called colonial ideals," had "rejected his family and native heritage" (Abraham 2-3; my emphasis). In Desai's descriptions, the "violent disassociation of the local Nepalis from the elite of Westernized Indians" is given prominence. As a result of "pervasive effects of […] colonialism and globalization" (Sabo 382), this has brought on a conflict of "competing structures of cultural knowledge and meaning" (Mohpatra 5). The novel shifts between domestic and national scenes, and shows social unrest stirred by the Gurkha Nationalist Liberation Front (GNLF), which advocates the mass occupation of private property (Desai 239-240). On the lands skirting the Patel estate, Mon Ami, new land-claimants supported by the nationalists build huts around the time the Patels' pet dog, Mutt, is

stolen away by a peasant. This man is determined to cross the "purebred dog" with local mongrels to breed puppies for sale (282-283). Desai frequently positions Mutt, who was groomed as a house-pet in the comfort of benevolent masters (35, 151), in opposition to the "Bhutia hill dogs" and the "battle-scarred mastiffs" of the villages: dogs with "ears stiff from having been bloodied over" and "disfigured by violence" (290). Indeed, the symbolism of the dog's abduction to be mated with hilly mongrels for commercial purposes goes beyond common thievery. Within the broader implications of the social disparities that divided the affluent Patels from the Kalimpong thoroughfares, Mutt's abduction by a random peasant who, in the larger scheme of the novel, remains nameless, reads as a radical expression meant to cause hurt and grave disrespect to a historical oppressor supported by the interregnum of social unrest.

The Inheritance of Loss also focuses on the romance of Jemubhai's granddaughter Sai and Gyan, a Nepali college student who is constantly provoked by the nationalist rebels. Their growing love relationship develops parallels to Jemubhai's fall from eminence in a changing world where his former glory as a judge, and as a pillar of society, no longer carries weight. The Patels continue to be hung up on the colonial worldview that, decades ago, they benefited from. Despite Sai having a liberal outlook on life and class-relations, her world is limited by the rigid boundaries set by the rest of the family that becomes a barrier between life at Mon Ami and "common folk" such as Gyan. The transfer of ownership of the pet dog therefore takes an additional significance in symbolizing the passing over from one class to the other. Perhaps, the appropriation of the dog by the peasantry insinuates the uncertain fates that await Jemubhai – and by extension, Sai – in the continuation of an interregnum that would have guaranteed her safety and respect had Sai been able to carry on an intimate relationship with Gyan. In *Disgrace*, by accepting Petrus' proposal of marriage, Lucy pragmatically works around (or deems to have circumvented) the precariousness of her future when the status quo hinged on historical privilege became reversed to a degree that made her defenseless and vulnerable. For a reader of the novel – especially, for a reader normalized in the power structure of white authority – Lucy's agreement to remain in Salem to be a "third wife" to her former field hand may present a shocking proposition. However, Lucy demonstrates anticipation and stoic pragmatism for one who chooses to stay which – like Jemubhai in *The Inheritance of Loss* – her father, David, fails to appreciate.

An alternative for the dispossession and disinheritance discussed above can be found in the promise of migration: an option that, all the same, is not equally feasible for all and, yet, entails grief and rupture. While the proposition of leaving one's home ahead of growing hostility underlines numerous complexities and dilemmas, it signifies

the frail promise of one's dignity being unharmed and saved from humiliation. Recent work such as Hebe De Souza's autobiographical novel *Black British* (2016) set in independent India between 1958 and 1974 discusses the alienation facing a Jewish-Christian family in a "new country" and closely investigates the uneasy territory between staying behind and leaving the familiar surroundings of home and city. *Black British* focuses on three young girls once growing up in a comfortable middle-class home and now living in fear of being broken into or being bodily assaulted and hurt. The family keeps dogs for safety and worries about the girls being predated on by the Hindus owing to skin color, religious faith, and social privilege. The narrator concedes how "without being told" each of the girls "recognized that [their] safety was compromised when [they] were alone" (De Souza 217). In the novel, Uncle Hugh, a prominent male in the family (and a member of the dying "old order") advises the girls to leave India so as not to "waste [their] lives" and not be "left holding the ladder for someone else to climb!" (244). The family's father further warns the girls against not being "a living sacrifice to the glories of yesteryear" (259). Unfortunately, a similar "exit strategy" in view of "freedom, courage, and hope" from "the dangerous and debilitating vortex of an age" (Perera) does not present itself for Sai in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and for which the pet dog Mutt's hapless future is a tragic embodiment.

In newly independent countries after World War II, nationalization policies were often adopted as an approach to development. These were geared towards uplifting the living standards of these "new countries" where education, social participation, and access to science and technology, during colonial occupation, had remained the prerogative of a few. Ceylon (renamed as Sri Lanka in 1972) is a textbook example of an Asian colony that adopted a broad nationalization programme immediately after independence from Britain in 1948. Between the 1950s and the mid-1970s, Ceylon's nationalization drive, at intervals, empowered policy to make transportation, health, and education public assets (Wickramasinghe 319-323). Land reforms imposing an upper-limit to private ownership enabled state-sponsored land reclamation and redistribution. As a result, a large number of foreign-owned plantations were drafted under companies set up by the state (De Silva 207; Wickramasinghe 318). Reforms introduced to Ceylonese education in the 1940s – in popular parlance, the "Kannangara reforms" – aimed through a network of central schools to take higher education to remote towns and villages (Sumathipala 339-343). Changes introduced to education which, as state policy, was now imparted in the local languages energized a "silent revolution" as young men and women from backgrounds previously barred from knowledge and opportunity – "a class of educated, frustrated, and angry young men" (Obeysekere 83) – gained

access to universities (83-84). This, in turn, revitalized the socio-economic and political aspirations of an emerging generation of rural and semi-rural youth who, in the decades to follow, motivated social activism and discussions on change. This included, in 1971, a failed youth rebellion aimed at deposing the government. This cursory background to Ceylon between the 1940s and the 1970s is significant to a reading of Chitra Fernando's novel, *Cousins,* particularly the novel's sections set in the Peradeniya University in the 1960s.

Cousins is a coming-of-age story of Amitha Herath, the daughter of a landed provincial family in a village in Sri Lanka's south-western coast. Having gained admission to Peradeniya University (at the time, the country's only university in a picturesque valley in the hills) in the mid-1960s, Amitha was among a group of affluent students brought in close contact with rural students on the residential campus, as beneficiaries of the education reforms of the 1940s referenced earlier. For a novelist who had had a privileged English education and had lived and worked in Australia for the greater part of her adult life, Fernando's visceral treatment of the anxieties and frictions between the extremes of the social divide is toned down by empathy, understanding and historical awareness. The novel's Peradeniya section refers to Bala, a common dog of undefined pedigree, whom the students petted and looked after. At one point, the disturbing news of Bala being killed by the university dog-catcher creates a disturbance among the students (Fernando 80). It mobilizes them to protest against the university administration (composed largely of the Anglicized class) and organize a demonstration. In threatening speeches, the organized students threaten fellow students from affluent backgrounds and the elite class.

In a fiery speech delivered in Sinhala – the language of the masses – a nationalist student compares Bala's destiny to that of the under-privileged rural poor of the country (81). The speech draws on issues disadvantaging the common student, including the continuing domination of English as the university's language of instruction that separated the nation's "collared dogs" from the "common dogs" (81-82). The speaker rhetorically questions: "Was the lot of the common man any better than the lot of the common dog?" (82):

> What were his chances in life? He was landless, powerless, helpless, the scapegoat for others' crimes, bullied and beaten up by the police, insulted by the rich and the powerful. Could this go on? There had to be social justice. There had to be equality. There had to be power-sharing. (82)

The associations and rhetorical devices embedded in the speech forcefully capture the status quo perpetuated over time by colonial domination and its enforced subservience on a class, as well as the desperation for class-emancipation among the rural intelligentsia. Marking an end to the protest meeting, the students remove Bala's carcass in a procession to give the deceased mongrel a dignified burial.

Coincidentally, the students also burn two effigies which they denounce as "symbols of imperialism and class privilege" (82): life-sized cutouts of two Anglicized females, one leading a dachshund on a leash, and the other, an Alsatian. The effigies were meant to represent Amitha's friends from the socialite English-speaking circle.

Published posthumously in a career where she was better known as a short-story writer, Fernando's *Cousins* is one of a few novels written in English in Sri Lanka that review with perceptive class-awareness the 1971 youth rebellion: an unsuccessful coup by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) led by Don Nandasiri "Rohana" Wijeweera, a splinter of the Communist Party of Ceylon (CP). Orchestrated as a class struggle to overthrow what the JVP identified as the capitalist bourgeoisie that had assumed control of the country from the British, the uprising (in the words of the Peradeniya-orator) was an abortive attempt by the "common dog" to undermine its "collared" counterpart. Fernando draws attention to a widely quoted speech Wijeweera delivered at a public rally held at Hyde Park, Colombo, in March 1970:

> The colonial economy, the Roman Dutch law, and the imperialist traditions established by the guns and bullets of foreign colonizers will be hounded out by the guns and bullets of our patriotic people. Comrades, I will end with the words of one of the greatest heroes of our time, Che Guevara, who believed that to live is to die in combat. 'There are only three places for a true revolutionary in these times. He should be among the dead or in a dark prison cell or on the battlefield.' What more is there to say after these inspiring words? (164)

The uprising which commenced on 5 April 1971 had among its cadre a remarkable presence of students and graduates. The universities of Peradeniya, Kelaniya (in 1971, the Vidyalankara Campus) and Sri Jayewardenepura (the Vidyodaya Campus) were the main rallying points of the rebels. The coup was suppressed by the state with considerable military assistance from international governments that included India, Pakistan, the United States, the USSR, and China resulting in the deaths of an estimated number between 5000 (Ivan 243) and 5000 to 10,000 (Halliday 201) persons. The disappearance of bodies left conclusive estimates difficult to pronounce. The 1971 insurrection is the first people's uprising in Ceylon aimed at overthrowing a government that had ruled since 1848 when organized peasants rebelled against the British colonial government in an unsuccessful bid for freedom. As a struggle, the uprising in 1971 was an equally unsuccessful attempt by an organized social class of the historically dispossessed at subverting a social system that was consolidated by colonialism.

Concluding Notes

The novels considered in this discussion present a range of responses from the elite classes challenged by the violence of decolonization, among whom Amitha in *Cousins* stands out as being introspective and proactively engaging with the changes taking place around her. Amitha's exposure to student politics and the tensions governing the Sinhala-speaking student mass on campus – of whose politics she was not directly participant, and of whose world she was not a part – yet makes Amitha reconsider her own historical and social privilege and grow out of social entitlements some others of her family took for granted. This eye-opening encounter has far-reaching effects including Amitha's resignation from the university where she otherwise enjoyed the prospect of becoming a lecturer and of securing an easy life. In a bid to make positive changes among the lives of the disadvantaged in her immediate sphere, Amitha assists in the studies of poor village children. She also composes historically informed books, including that of a poor boy in the village, Saman, who was found killed and burnt after having participated in the 1971 insurgency (Fernando 177). Amitha's response in accepting the transitional world around her shares some superficial similarities with Lucy's outlook in *Disgrace*. While, as explained earlier, the violence Lucy absorbs with resignation translates to an atonement of sorts which she burdens as payment for the historical role of her class in South Africa, Amitha navigates between two worlds – that of the "haves" and the "haves not" of her village – attempting to lessen the divide by generating awareness. In 1989, during a second armed insurrection by the JVP, rebels arriving at Amitha's home praise her for her social work in the community.

However, in framing Amitha's response to the emerging social order Fernando's politics is at times too simplistic and fails to effectively capture the complex uncertainties that underwrite human actions at times of upheaval. Persons such as Judge Patel in *The Inheritance of Loss* as individuals vulnerable to the changes happening around them futilely turn to structures such as the police that they treat apolitically as public servants and who, nonetheless, have also changed to favor new institutions and configurations of power. Removed from compelling ground realities taking shape under them and nostalgia for the past, their social attitudes lack strength to negotiate with the emerging new order while also lacking potential for the kind of moral transformation Amitha, in *Cousins*, experiences. While migration and re-location present a viable alternative – as was experienced by the Burghers of Ceylon, who shared Dutch ancestry, in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Muller 209) – it was a solution hinged on privilege and support systems not open to all. Women like Lucy and Sai are

challenged by their compromised participation in the new order and the burden of a silent trauma as they carry on.

The killing of dogs discussed in this essay, as a form of expression, encourages a re-evaluation of power relations and changes to the status quo established, enforced, and managed by the colonial world during postcolonial resurgence. The works of fiction examined in this discussion draw attention to different ways in which this disruption takes place and their potential consequences in the volatile, unsettled stirrings of a "new country." The violence embedded in acts of slaughter and harm represents a wide range of significations from contempt, revenge to demonstrations of symbolically reversing history. This complication of what, at a glance, may appear as banal violence on helpless animals and beasts is essential for a reading of the psychology of the post-colony; in particular, of its agitation against its own past, and working-through towards a future freed from the shackles of colonialism.

Notes

1. Attempts at critically representing this reductive colonial mindset among British/European persons – particularly, as they lived and worked in the colonies – are found in the early work of, among others, Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. I refer to the characterization of Mr. Green in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and that of Mr. Thompson and Dr. Lynd in wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*. British writers who cultivated an anti-imperial outlook as a result of travels and exposure to India and Ceylon such as E M Forster – particularly in *A Passage to India* – and Leonard Woolf in his short stories generate a similar critique. For an illustrative example, I refer the reader to Woolf's story "Pearls and Swine."

2. For an informative discussion of racial categories being mirrored on domesticated animals, and the use of rabies legislation in the calculated extermination of local breeds, see Josh Doble's study based on Kenya and Zambia (2020). For a comprehensive study of Victorian thinking about animals in the context of class, natural history, and colonial culture, refer to Harriet Ritvo's *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (1987).

Works Cited

Abraham, Panavelil. "Postcolonial dilemmas in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*." *Journal of Research Scholars and*

Professionals in English Language Teaching, vol. 1, no. 3, 2017, pp. 1-12.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann, 1958.

— . *No Longer at Ease*, Heinemann, 1960.

Baderoon, Gabeba. "Animal Likenesses: Dogs and The Boundary of The Human in South Africa." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2017, pp. 345-361.

Barney, Richard A. "On (not) giving up: animals, biopolitics, and the impersonal in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Textual Practice*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2016, pp. 509-530.

Blum, Binyamin. "The Hounds of Empire: Forensic Dog Tracking in Britain and its Colonies, 1888-1953." *Law and History Review 621*, 2017, repository.uchastings.edu/faculty_scholarship/1503. Accessed 02 July 2022.

Buckle, Catherine. *Innocent Victims*. Merlin Unwin Books, 2009.

Chakrabarti, Pratik. "Beasts of Burden: Animals and Laboratory Research in Colonial India." *History of Science*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2010, pp. 125-152.

Coetzee, J M. *Disgrace*. Vintage Books, 2000.

De Silva, KM. *Sri Lanka's Troubled Inheritance*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2007.

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. Penguin Books, 2006.

Doble, Josh. "Can Dogs be Racist? The Colonial Legacies of Racialized Dogs in Kenya and Zambia." *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 89, 2020, pp. 68-89.

Doshi, Tishani. *Small Days and Nights*. Bloomsbury, 2019.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. Grove Press, 1967.

Fernando, Chitra. *Cousins*. Sarasavi Publishers, 1999.

Forster, E M. *A Passage to India*. Edward Arnold, 1924.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Lawrence & Wishart, 1971.

Hagen, Jack. *The Zambezi Incident*. Publish America, 2004.

Halliday, Fred. "The Ceylonese Insurrection." *Explosion in a Subcontinent*, edited by Robin Blackburn, Penguin Books, 1975, pp. 151-220.

Herron, Tom. "The Dog Man: Becoming Animal in Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 51, no.4, 2005, pp. 467-490.

Ivan, Victor. *71 Kaerella*. Ravaya Publishers, 2010.

Jayawardena, Kumari. *Perpetual Ferment: Popular Revolts in Sri Lanka in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Social Scientists Association, 2010.

Louw, Pat. "Wildness and Colonialism in 'The Story of Two Dogs' by Doris Lessing." *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* vol. 55, no. 3, 2018, pp. 174-185.

Marais, Michael. "Very morbid phenomena: 'Liberal Funk', the 'Lucy syndrome' and J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*", *Scrutiny 2*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2001, pp. 32-38.

Mohapatra, Ashok K. "Social Exclusion in Postcolonial Fiction: A Reading of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*". *Occasional Papers on Literatures and Cultures (Monograph 1)*, Sambalpur University, 2011, pp. 1-32.

Muller, Carl. *The Jam Fruit Tree*. Penguin Books India, 1994.

Ngũgĩ Wa' Thiong'o. *A Grain of Wheat*. Heinemann, 1967.

Obeysekere, Ranjani. "The Bilingual Intelligentsia: Their Contribution to the Intellectual Life of Sri Lanka in the Twentieth Century." *Honouring EFC Ludowyk: Felicitation Essays*, edited by Percy Colin Thomé and Ashley Halpé. Tisara Prakasakayo, 1984, pp. 71-91.

Parry, Tyler D. and Charlton W. Yingling. "Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas." *Past & Present 246*, 2020, pp. 69-108.

Perera, Vihanga. “Leaving Kanpur: On Hebe De Souza’s *Black British*”. *Corridors Across Lanka*, 2019, https://lankanassociate.wordpress.com/2019/06/12/leaving-home-leaving-kanpur-on-hebe-de-souzas-black-british/. Accessed 20 June 2024.

Poyner, Jane. “Truth and Reconciliation in J M Coetzee’s *Disgrace*.” *Scrutiny* 2, vol. 5, no. 2, 2000, pp. 67-77.

Ritvo, Harriet. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age.* Harvard UP, 1987.

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Verso, 2018.

Roffey, Monique. *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle*. Simon and Schuster, 2009.

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight’s Children*. Jonathan Cape, 1981.

Sabo, Oana. “Disjunctures and Diaspora in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2012, pp. 375-392.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. “‘Preface’ to *The Wretched of the Earth*”. Translated by Richard Philcox. Grove Press, 2004.

Shadle, Brett L. “Cruelty and Empathy, Animals and Race, in Colonial Kenya.” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2012, pp. 1097-1116.

Skabelund, Aaron Herald. *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World*. Cornell UP, 2011.

Sumathipala, KHM. *Sri Lankavé Adhyapana Ithihasaya: 1796-1965*. Translated by Henrietta Kumarapperuma *et al*. Education Publications Department, 1993.

Tropp, Jacob. “Dogs, Poison and the Meaning of Colonial Intervention in the Transkei, South Africa.” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2002, pp. 451-472.

Wickramasinghe, Nira. *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*. Oxford UP, 2014.

Woolf, Leonard. *Stories from the East*. Hogarth Press, 1921.

Wylie, Dan. "'They've killed the dogs!': Land, Literature and Canines in Contemporary Zimbabwe." *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2018, pp. 186-199.