BETWEEN THE NATIONALISTS AND THE FUNDAMENTALISTS, STILL WE HAVE HOPE!
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Introduction

In this chapter we will focus on the relationship between affect and utopian and dystopian politics in contemporary post-war Sri Lanka. We make three main claims: first, that affect plays a crucial role in Sri Lankan politics and this has been underestimated and addressed by many liberal and progressive political actors. Second, the relationship between affect and politics is both locally contextual but also **not** something that applies only to non-western societies that are often treated as having 'dysfunctional' or 'immature' politics. Third, while the dominant affective landscape feeds a dystopian vision of politics, there are also forms of utopian politics that are building alternative affective communities. These alternatives highlight both the embodied and the concrete nature of utopian political action that refute the characterization of utopianism as abstract and unrealistic.

To support these arguments our chapter consists of two core parts. First, in highlighting the importance of engaging with the affective dimension of politics in contemporary Sri Lanka we seek to bring into conversation two separate bodies of literature. Firstly, the anthropological literature that has highlighted the role that ritual and myth have played in grounding and sustaining past political violence in Sri Lanka (Spencer, 2007; Kapferer, 1988, 2001; Tambiah, 1986) and that continue to influence contemporary political discourse (Gunatilleke, 2018; Ambos, 2015). Secondly, the theoretical work - focused mainly on the West - that has sought to trace the role that emotion plays in politics of domination, exclusion, oppression and resistance (Berlant, 2011; Ahmed, 2004; Connolly, 2002). In the process we present an account that both expands and adds context to existing political theory that engages with emotion and helps to explain the limits of liberal and progressive political responses to Sri Lanka's past violence and more recent events like the Easter 2019 bombings and their aftermath. We trace the ways in which emotions of fear, love and hate are articulated and capitalized upon in mainstream political discourse in Sri Lanka in ways that both resonate with but are also distinct from accounts originating in the West.

In the second part of the chapter we seek to move beyond this dystopian view of politics and affect. In particular, drawing on activist work that both of us but particularly Cegu Isadeen have been involved in, we seek to contribute to an understanding of the role that affect plays in the creation of utopian politics. Specifically we document the ways in which embodied and affective practices of friendship, play and imagination have allowed us to cultivate hope as a form of engaged, collective political action (Wright, 2008). In this process we resist the categorization of utopianism as unrealistic and abstract but rather provide examples of how it is being enacted in concrete ways.

We argue that while at first glance the socio-political context of Sri Lanka would reinforce a dystopian reading of the relationship between emotion and politics, our own engagements highlight a small but flourishing space for the enactment of alternative forms of utopian politics. These forms rely heavily on the development of alternative affective communities. Thus, while the overriding public emotions may be of fear, despair and hopelessness – effectively mobilized by dominant political actors - there remains a countercurrent that is

committed to generating spaces of pleasure and care and these represent perhaps the most important basis for building a radical political alternative in Sri Lanka. This may help push the future direction of progressive left politics both in Sri Lanka and beyond (Chrostowska, 2016; Gandhi, 2005).

Emotions and Politics

Since the 'affective turn' of the 1990s there has been a steadily growing interest in the relationship between emotions and political life. While we share some of the skepticism of Ruth Leys (2011a; 2011b) regarding some political and cultural theorists' engagement with affect,[1] groundbreaking studies such as Sara Ahmed's, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* have provided much needed insight into the role that emotion plays in stabilizing particular dominant political discourses and practices. For our purposes we will rely heavily on feminist 'politics of emotions' approaches (Boler and Zembylas, 2016; Hemmings, 2012; Ahmed, 2005), steering clear of the more esoteric accounts of affect that draw on neuroscience and in the process demonstrate, 'a mistaken commitment to the idea of a presumed separation between the affect system on the one hand and signification or meaning or intention on the other' (Leys, 2011b, p.800). We also endorse Ahmed's view regarding, 'the importance of understanding emotions not as psychological dispositions but as investments in social norms.' (Ahmed 2005, p.56)

As Blom and Tawa Lama-Rewal note:

> A growing number of scholarly works show that emotions, both negative (such as fear, anger, hatred, disgust, grief, sadness, indignation, shame, guilt and resentment) and positive (such as trust, compassion, love, pride, pleasure and joy) are not only pervasive in political life but also have explanatory power. (2020, p.2).

At the same time most of the accounts of how emotions and politics interact have been focused on and in the West (Blom and Tawa Lama Rewal, 2020; Navaro, 2017). While Blom and Tawa Lama Rewal in their recent edited volume provide some much needed redress to this - focusing on the role of emotion in contentious politics in South Asia - much remains to be said. With this in mind we look to Sri Lanka: a context which empirically if not theoretically has contributed extensively to an understanding of the relationship between particular affects and the politics they might inspire.

Even those with a passing familiarity with the South Asian island will know of its history of extreme violence and terror. Thirty years of civil war have been accompanied with horrific outbursts of intra-communal political violence both in the Sinhalese majority South – a period known in Sinhalese as 'the terror' (*Beeshanaya*) - and the Tamil dominated North and East. Infamously home of the original suicide bomber, its 40+ year history of engaging in "wars of

[1] In particular Leys' points to problems with the reproduction of mind/body splits and preconscious 'affect' versus socially and discursively produced significations that she considers to emerge – implicitly or explicitly – in the work of cultural theorists such as Brian Massumi and William Connolly. See also Navaro (2017) and Boler and Zembylas (2016) for more critiques.

terror"[2] mean Sri Lanka should serve as both an example and a warning of what happens to politics when fear is fostered over years.

However, while many working in and on Sri Lanka have noted the common sense ways in which terror and fear have affected politics, there have been few attempts to theorise the relationship.[3] This seems to mirror the example of subaltern studies in India where, 'if emotions were noticed (often in connection with the religious dimension of the 'subaltern consciousness", commented on and occasionally analysed, their significance was limited to a series of remarks in passing (Blom and Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2020, p.5). In the context of Sri Lanka, while there is a rich body of scholarship exploring the relationships between politics, violence and ritual they have not had much to say about the role that emotion plays in this process. Meanwhile the studies that have focused on emotional responses to the violence and suffering have rarely sought to connect these to any understanding of political implications.

Narratives of Difference, Myths of the State: Sri Lanka

As we have already noted, the history of postcolonial Sri Lanka has been one marked by repeated waves of extreme political violence. In popular international discourse this has been explained in terms of 'ethnic conflict' however in reality the various political actors and motivations behind the violence are more complex. Numerous scholars (Spencer, 2014, 2008; Kapferer, 2001, 1994; Tambiah, 1986; Sivanandan, 1984) have documented the ways in which economic and political shifts over time have led to the sedimentation of ethnic identity and provided the groundwork for the violence. At the same time Bruce Kapferer (2001) helpfully highlights the structuring and ordering role that both expansive bureaucratization and extreme violence have played in shaping everyday life and social struggles. He insightfully points out: 'The disorder of violence does not necessarily reflect a disordered world, rather its structuring and creatively organizing movement' (2001, p.64).

Organised violence and the terror it generates have been structuring factors of society and politics in Sri Lanka for many decades. So too have these been overlaid with ritual and spiritual dimensions. This takes the form of the reproduction of particular mythical histories that help shore up exclusionary, ethnonationalist and chauvinist politics (Gunatilleke, 2018) and the co-option of popularly practiced rituals by political elites.[4] However while Kapferer (2001) has provided detailed accounts of the role of myth and ritual in this process, there is perhaps more to be said about the role emotion plays.

Alongside scholarship exploring the relationship between myth, ritual and politics - particularly as it impacts on the narratives of nationalist political elites and the State - there has also been extensive work done on the relationship between people's responses to trauma

[2] There is insufficient space here to fully detail Sri Lanka's modern history of political violence and conflict, involving both Tamil separatist movements in the North and East of the island and disaffected Sinhalese youth in the South. For detailed accounts see De Votta (2004); Uyangoda (2007); Uyangoda and Biyanwila (1997).

[3] We engage with one of these attempts later in the chapter.

[4] Our collaborator Eva Ambos (2015) has documented this in relation to practices of the earlier Rajapakse regime and we all observed this at a ritual performed in 2019 for then President Maithripala Sirisena at the nationally (and significantly inter-communally) important festival held annually at Kataragama.

and strategies of survival through their engagement with spirit worlds and ritual (Somasundaram, 2014; Argenti-Pillen, 2013; Derges, 2012; Perera, 2001; Lawrence, 2000, 1997). Yet in general these two fields of study have not been brought together in a way that allows us to understand and explore the interaction between emotion (and in particular the affective legacies of trauma and violence), rituals (as sites of political and social significance) and politics (formal and informal).[5] The relevance of this line of inquiry was perhaps all the more foregrounded following the events of April 2019 to which we will now turn.

The 2019 Easter Bombings and their Aftermath

This history of terror, nationalism and violence has remained a challenge to the post-war State and civil society as they sought to engage in various forms of transitional justice and reconciliation. Indeed there is much to be said about how an engagement with affect theory may also enrich our understanding of these processes but it is beyond the scope of this chapter.[6] The affective dimension of politics was instead brought much closer to the present following the events of Easter 2019 when there were a series of bombings across the island perpetrated by self-proclaimed Islamic militants.[7] What followed was an outpouring of panic, fear and rage that manifested itself in various forms including attacks on Muslim communities, the boycotting of Muslim businesses and the targeting – by both authorities and ordinary members of the public – of Muslims as outsiders and a major threat to the nation (Gunasingham, 2019).

While the standard fiery political rhetoric, mob attacks and passing of discriminatory legislation formed a feature of the Islamophobia that followed the bombings, there was another dimension that was remarked upon but remains to be properly analysed. Rumours – some that had been simmering for a while – flared and circulated wildly that Muslim eateries were adding chemicals to *koothu roti* and *briyani* (two fast food staples across the island) that led to sterility in men (Ananthavinayagan, 2020). In Batticaloa there was an additional rumour that a popular Muslim clothes shop sold bras tainted with chemicals that also led to infertility leading to a complete boycott. There is a now fairly extensive literature on rumour as a form of subaltern political discourse. In this case the rumours that circulated added affective weight to the Islamophobic political rhetoric deployed by Tamil and Sinhalese nationalists alike (Amarasingham 2019). It also did not influence only audiences already sympathetic to communal political messages but had wide-reaching effects on popular discourse and imaginaries (as we will return to later). In concrete terms it led to the detention

[5] For a first attempt to think through the relationship between the latter two see Grewal, K. 2019. Politics beyond Institutions: The Creation of New Social Imaginaries in Post-War Sri Lanka. *Social Alternatives*, 37(4). Our research collaborators Eva Ambos and Kaushalya Ariyaratne have also been exploring the relationship between these three dimensions in their own recent work on healing rituals (Ambos) and transgender performance (Ariyaratne) as part of our British Academy funded research project, 'Building Critical Democratic Communities in Post-War Sri Lanka' [WEBLINK TO FOLLOW].

[6] This is work we are currently engaged in through our British Academy-funded project, 'Building Critical Democratic Communities in Post-War Sri Lanka' [WEBLINK TO FOLLOW]. For discussion of this in another post-conflict context see the work of Jasmina Husanovic, including 2015. Economies of affect and traumatic knowledge: lessons on violence, witnessing and resistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Ethnicity Studies*, 2015/2: 19-35.

[7] For a detailed breakdown of events see: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48010697 and Amarasingham (2019).

of a Muslim doctor on allegations that he had sterilized thousands of Sinhalese women in a hospital in the provincial city of Kurunegala (Ulmer and Rajarathnam, 2019).

Alongside more detailed exploration of how rumour serves to reinforce and disrupt dominant political discourses and imaginaries in Sri Lanka, we also urge for greater attention to the specificity of the images invoked. The highly gendered and embodied nature of the alleged threat and its connection with such intimate areas of life as food and reproduction requires much deeper analysis than we can propose here. However the affective impact is unquestionable. In the words of Prabha Manuratne, 'the 2019 presidential election in Sri Lanka can be described as one that manipulated grief and fear at unprecedented levels in Sri Lanka' (2020, p.4).

Commenting on a particularly widely reproduced image of a blood spattered statue of Christ from one of the churches bombed, Manuratne observes that affect was mobilized to both construct a sense of ethno-religious threat and to produce a bodily feeling of fear and panic:

> Images such as the [blood spattered statue] organize our social imaginary of the political space around the feeling of persecution, fear and panic, which then function as an economic manner of organizing the political. When terror strikes, imagination shrinks and the boundaries of political action become limited to the passive disengagement with politics (2020, p.4).

The specificity of the statue of Christ and the connected ideas of martyrdom and persecution are significant because they are both universally recognisable and tied up with the particular recent history of Sri Lanka and its decades long war. The martyr is a trope that has allowed for both community formation (by the LTTE in the context of the Tamil community (Orjuela, 2008) and to a lesser extent for the Sinhalese State through the figure of the *Ranaviru* (war hero)(De Mel, 2007) *and* has a very particular history of terror (given that suicide bombing was first developed and used extensively as a tool of war in Sri Lanka). With this context it becomes possible to identify the ways in which mainstream contemporary politics in Sri Lanka makes sense at an affective level that is often missed by commentators and critics. Liberals and progressives alike lament the irrationality of the population, drawn in by rituals, myths and spiritual imagery, depoliticised and render passive by political elites who manipulate them.[8] But how might a more thoughtful and serious engagement with the affective dimension help in the development of political responses? As Bruce Kapferer points out, '[m]yths have force and an emotional power in the spheres of human action because their logic or reasoning connects with the way human beings are already oriented within their realities.' (2001, p.46). Connected and adding to this, we might draw on Sara Ahmed's observation that:

> In order to break the seal of the past, in order to move away from attachments that are hurtful, we must first bring them into the realm of political action. Bringing pain into politics requires we give up the fetish of the wound through different kinds of

[8] This was certainly a resounding theme in a workshop we organized in Colombo in July 2019 on the question of the 'political' in post-Easter 2019 Sri Lanka.

> remembrance. The past is living rather than dead; the past lives in the very wounds that remain open in the present. (2005, p.33)

So when Kapferer points out that nationalism and communalism take on meaning through the everyday experiences of villagers being attacked (2001, p.41), we might add that this history and memory then shapes the affective landscapes within which current political messages ground themselves. In the words of Ahmed: 'The production [of the object of fear] depends on past histories of association...The movement of fear between signs is what allows the object of fear to be generated in the present… The movement between signs allows others to be attributed with emotional value…' (2005, pp.66-67).

To contextualise: in the east of Sri Lanka, waves of massacres by and against Muslims (Amarasingham, 2019) have created a historical memory – both personal and collective – which is all too easily tapped into at an affective level in the current political climate. In the words of William Connolly: 'When people with such intense collective memories face new circumstances that trigger them, a set of dispositions to perception, feeling, interpretation, and action are called into play' (Connolly, 2002, p.35). Scholars have argued in relation to the Holocaust (Connolly, 2002) and 9/11 (Holland, 2013; O'Tuathail, 2003), that traumatic memories can invoke a set of 'gut reactions' and visceral responses that may bypass some forms of reflection and rational choice making. Even bearing in mind Leys' (2011a; 2011b) caution (discussed above) about reproducing an affect/reason binary, it seems productive to try and think through how this account may enrich our understandings of how and why certain political narratives resonate.

In the context of Sri Lanka it might also help explain why, even as there have been generations of progressive scholars and activists who have sought to discredit and counter the myths and historical narratives of nationalist and communalist forces they have failed to convince the popular majority. As Kapferer himself noted back in 1988:

> …reasoned corrections of popular Sri Lankan history are excellent examples of the responsible intellectual and scholarly concern to demystify the distortions of myth. While this exercise is essential, it *fails to address some of the crucial ways in which myth and cosmic history achieve their emotional potency*. (1988, p.40, emphasis added)

This is where an engagement with some of the recent literature on affect in relation to politics may be helpful. To again quote Ahmed, '[e]motions may be crucial to showing us why transformations are so difficult (we are invested in what we critique), but also how they are possible (our investments move as we move)' (2004, p.172).

In highlighting the significant role that emotion plays in Sri Lankan politics we do not wish to suggest that this is somehow extraordinary to Sri Lanka. This orientalist fantasy of the overly emotional east, unfit or too immature in the past for self-government and in the present for the rationality of (western) liberal democracy can surely no longer hold sway in a world post-Brexit and Trump. Rather we wish to argue that paying attention to the role emotion plays in

the political is both important to understanding the specificity of Sri Lanka and provides us with insights that may be helpful to theorizing politics and emotion more generally.

It is also not that the relation to emotion and politics has been completely undocumented in relation to Sri Lanka. Malathi de Alwis (2009) has evocatively explored the political potential of acts of maternal mourning in her documentation of the Mothers Front movement of mothers of the disappeared. Rather than accepting as many earlier scholars had (Uyangoda, 1997) that the mother's grief and lamentation were simply manipulations by the State and the reproduction and depoliticizing of dominant ideologies (ethnic, political, gendered), de Alwis asks, '[p]erhaps the need of the hour rather is to interrogate the "political" via more affectual categories such as grief, injury and suffering' (2009, p.88). Indebted to de Alwis' work (and drawing on her mentorship subsequently), we too have returned to this question and in particular the challenge she poses in her engagement with Butler to think about how a politics of reaching outwards may be created through such affects as grief. At the same time we have been attempting to think about how our activities link to feminists' particular interest in emotion (Boler and Zembylas, 2016; Hemmings, 2012; Ahmed, 2005) and theorisations of utopian radical politics as embodied, grounded in practice and deeply affective (Chrostowska and Ingram, 2016; Wright, 2008; Gandhi, 2005).

Creating Alternate Affective Communities

While Grewal's engagements with Sri Lanka began in 2012 in a scholarly capacity, Cegu Isadeen primarily identifies as an activist. Her work in various feminist and women's rights collectives led to her introduction to Grewal in 2015. Since then we have worked together, alongside a number of others to experiment with different forms of solidarity and community building beyond the standard activist networks and activities in which Cegu Isadeen also remains deeply embedded.

With so many civil society spaces in Sri Lanka organized around productive logics of 'workshops' and 'training', since 2015 we have collectively sought to establish other informal spaces of gathering for activists and friends.[9] Starting with our cooption of a feminist friend's house in the provincial, deeply war-scarred town of Mullaitivu one holiday, we began to simply 'hang out': a fluid group – composed of friends but always open to newcomers, often referred by word of mouth – began to gather semi-regularly. Often it would be to discuss the social challenges many were either facing directly or witnessing in their communities (gender inequality, discrimination, poverty, war-related loss and suffering, disability, disappearance). Sometimes these discussions tried to think of strategies for responding, sometimes they were opportunities to collectively discuss theories that many had heard of but few really understood (feminism, postcolonialism, transitional justice, democracy). And sometimes these spaces were just used as a place of respite from normal routines and familial pressures: places to relax, sleep, eat, do nothing. As a result of both personal investment and the good fortune of receiving fieldwork funding for a large research project, in 2018 we were able to establish our own 'feminist house' in the eastern town of Batticaloa where we have been

[9] In many ways this was inspired by and builds on earlier feminists' efforts such as those of Poorani and Vallamai in Jaffna and Suriya and Samathai in Batticaloa (documented in Grewal, 2017).

conducting research since 2017. This house has served not only as a base for fieldwork but much more: a semi-permanent space for all the activities described above.

In two recent articles on women's experiences of pleasure and insecurity in public spaces in South Asia (India and Pakistan), Shilpa Phadke (2020) and Nida Kirmani (2020) ask, 'whether the pursuit of fun and enjoyment can be thought of as a political act and whether in particular it can be categorized as "feminist"' (Kirmani, 2020, p.322). In the case of our 'feminist house' we would strongly assert the affirmative. While we spend significant time discussing ideas, critically reflecting on the social issues we see around us and strategizing for how we might best respond, we also dedicate extensive time to simply enjoying each other's company. We sing, we dance, we play silly games. We share secrets and gossip, watch Bollywood movies together, prepare meals, go on boat trips. These are not incidental or tangential to the collective's political work. Rather we would argue they are integral and essential parts of the creation of the community. We endorse Clare Hemmings' observation that, 'in order to know differently we have to feel differently (2012, p.150).

Apart from providing us with relief and escape from the hard realities many in the group are living on a daily basis (from the personal and familial through to the communal and larger socio-political contexts), the space we have created also allows us to develop, model and theorise the alternative forms of community we wish to see. We experiment with ways to disagree, to enact democratic decision-making, to construct communities of care beyond those sanctioned by the conservative, patriarchal, hetero-normative contexts within which we are socialized. We expose ourselves and are exposed to radical difference with Others who we have always been told we cannot ever know (Tamil, Muslim, Sinhalese, 'White' (meaning here non-Sri Lankan), urban and rural, queer and straight, married, single, divorced, of different castes and class, language and educational backgrounds, etc). In this sense we may be enacting a form of 'prefigurative utopianism' similar to that argued by Ruth Kinna in her reading of the Occupy movement: 'deliberately putting the political values they enacted in practice ahead of any strategic ends or simply advancing their cause' (Ingram, 2016, p.XXIX). Phadke (2020) makes a similar observation in her analysis of a project of women 'loiterers' in India: that the mere performance of alternative ways of being may pave the way for change or at least initiate the conversation required to make this happen. Moreover this is not through the formulation of an ideological argument but through embodied practice, a Rancièrian act of dissensus.[10]

We also further illustrate the point made by various others that the creation of pleasure, joy and hope does not require an absence of fear, insecurity, hardship and suffering (Phadke, 2020; Kirmani, 2020; Wright, 2008). Rather, these can and are cultivated in response and resistance to these dominant affective landscapes within which many of us are positioned. Just as Wright (2008) documents in her study of Filipino farmers' grassroots activism, the hope we generate is neither individualized nor is it merely wishful thinking. Instead it, 'draws on connection and on the work of creating and recreating solidarities through the very act of living' (2008, p.224). It is grounded in practice, sustained through collectivization and involves processes of imagining that are explicitly embodied. Moreover, we see friendship and the

[10] For further discussion of Rancière's account of democratic politics as it might relate to Sri Lanka see Grewal (2017).

building of affective ties (and indeed alternate kinships) as equally important to the creation of political alliances.

In this sense our engagements perhaps in some small way mirror those Leela Gandhi seeks to document and valourise in her beautiful 2005 book, *Affective Communities*. In explaining why she privileges, after Derrida, the trope of friendship in her articulation of a particular form of utopian politics she writes, '[friendship is] the most comprehensive philosophical signifier for all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to see expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging' (2005, p10). For Gandhi, Derrida, 'recognizes in the unscripted relation of "friendship" an improvisational politics appropriate to communicative, sociable utopianism, investing it with a vision of radical democracy: yet "to come", "indefinitely perfectible", "always insufficient and future"' (2005, p.19). In this sense we might read our own endeavours as performing two functions. First, they act as a resistance to the narrow forms of (ethnonationalist, caste-based, patriarchal and heteronormative) kinship that dominate the existing structures and affects of Sri Lankan society and politics. Second, they form an attempt at articulating alternative structures and affective bases for communities to which we may wish to belong: communities that as Sara Ahmed writes in relation to feminism, are open to others' anger without defensiveness, are sites of discomfort (requiring constant self-reflection) but also of wonder (2005, p.184) and hopefully also of care.

In the aftermath of the Easter Bombings the importance of this creation of affective communities has become clearer than ever. As one of our group has also written about (Thananjan, 2020), it was devastating to see how groups of activists who had worked together across ethnic and religious division – even in the midst of conflict – were stricken by distrust and fear of each other. She describes a gathering where one woman refused to eat food prepared by a Muslim woman citing the common rumour circulating at the time about the adulteration of food with sterilizing substances. Another spoke of her fear during her bus ride when a Muslim woman in a burqa came and sat next to her. What these examples show is that fear is not something simply fabricated and manipulated by political elites but is experienced in deeply embodied ways. As we noted above, the power of these rumours was the fear and mistrust they tapped into or generated even amongst those not otherwise aligned with nationalist and communalist causes. To recognise this does not validate or excuse but does require us to take seriously how we might respond. It also highlights the importance of building not just political but affective bonds in our activist networks. These affective bonds provide the basis for trust that allow difficult conversations to take place and also enable different forms of belonging and affinity that might rival dominant versions.

Conclusion

As Sara Ahmed observes, '…the question of the future is an affective one; it is a question of hope for what we might yet be, as well as fear for what we could become.' (Ahmed, 2005, p.184). In this chapter we have outlined the ways in which the future is framed as one of fear within mainstream political discourse – drawing on both the specific histories of terror and trauma that shape contemporary Sri Lanka and more general populist tendencies that we also observe elsewhere. This has been mobilized in ways that promote and reinforce authoritarian

and militaristic forms of governance. Engaging with affect in this context might both help us understand how and why certain discourses resonate in Sri Lanka (something that many scholars and political actors have struggled with) and contribute to 'actively diversify[ing] the inspirations for affect' that Navaro (2017) encourages as a way of enriching (and decolonizing) existing theory.

At the same time, we have pointed to spaces that are enacting a different form of affective politics: a form that seeks to counteract the role of fear through carefully crafting alternate bonds and to enliven alternate imaginaries on which notions of community might be built. This form of affective politics founds itself on ideas of friendship, pleasure and care and is also explicitly hopeful in a way that is grounded and embodied. Documenting (as well as engaging in) this alternate form of affective politics is meaningful we contest, beyond simply providing a source of support and rejuvenation in difficult shall we say dystopian times.

On the one hand it serves to counter the general claim that those who assert another world is possible are utopian meaning unrealistic. On the contrary we show that these are embodied, concrete practices that allow us to experiment with and develop possible worlds and relationships in critically self-reflexive ways. On the other, it resists the more standard progressive political response that urges us to think more strategically and concretely about political platforms and agendas. We argue that these forms of politics perpetuate notions of 'rationality' that are not only undermined in theory but remain incapable in practice of properly coming to terms with the affective pull of the violent and exclusionary imaginaries that dominate popular politics. Instead our focus is on cultivating a type of 'immature politics' of friendship valourised by Gandhi (2005) in her historiography of anti-colonial engagements in 19th century Britain. This, Gandhi suggests (and we agree) may allow us to enliven a dormant form of utopian left politics that has been neglected in the 20th century but way be worth revisiting in these dystopian times.

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