

## **If the Moon Smiles on the Mappers of Madness: A Critique of the Cartographers of Insanity in Chandani Lokugé's *If the Moon Smiled* Anway Mukhopadhyay**

A girl bows to the Buddha amidst a crowd of lotuses and is asked to learn detachment. Petal by petal madness blooms and then mirror by mirror looks at other people's madness. The moon smiles at those who have sought to map madness. And the smile takes the shape of words, words that are cancerous growths on silence.

Chandani Lokugé's novel, *If the Moon Smiled*, grows under the shadow of this smile. If it is not totally unjust to identify the 'dominant' tropes of a text, we may say that, in Lokuge's text, they are *place* and *body*. Manthri, the protagonist of Lokugé's narrative, gradually becomes a schizophrenic personality, and one may be tempted to explain her tragedy in terms of the motif of 'place and displacement,' which is, as argue Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 'a major feature of post-colonial literatures.'<sup>1</sup> However, the predicament of Lokugé's protagonist cannot be construed simply as the case of a failed immigrant. She is a Sri Lankan girl, brought by her authoritarian husband to Australia after marriage, without any effort on his part to understand whether his wife is a willing emigrant. Nevertheless, Manthri's problem is not only that of an immigrant who lacks the capacity to adjust in an alien environment – it is deeply grounded in the issue of her gendered body, a body which is both a site of patriarchal inscription and a moving image of repetitive displacement – physical, ontological, and psychical. Again, the body is linked with the issue of the limitations of embodiedness, which also characterises the body politic.

The Buddhist culture in which Manthri grows up betrays a peculiar self-contradiction. It prescribes detachment in a situation where attachment is made necessary for women by the sexual division of labour. It teaches the Buddhist doctrine of universal impermanence and yet prepares the female body for a marital *telos*. Nirvana is not what the everyday world of this Buddhist society seeks; its pragmatic goals are ridiculously at odds with its ritual invocation of the trope of impermanence. Manthri, the little girl, 'blends her voice with his (the father's): "As these flowers must fade, so must my body towards destruction go."<sup>2</sup> However, just a few pages after, the mother, drawing on Yasodara's devotion to the Buddha, announces that Manthri will be a 'floral offering' to her husband who is now metaphorically linked to the figure of 'a deity.'<sup>3</sup> So, the impermanent body of the girl must be prepared as a *permanent* offering for the husband-shaped deity – an absurd contradiction in the 'impermanence'-saturated discourse that is part of their everyday religious life.

When Mahendra, her husband, does not see any 'stain' on the 'crushed white sheet' after the coitus, he is appalled and the wife immediately becomes a 'serpent' in his misogynistic imagination.<sup>4</sup> She tries to persuade him that she is innocent but he is rigidly fixed in his imagination of the woman's profanity. While on a pilgrimage with her daughter-in-law, Manthri's mother-in-law tells her, 'Look at the creepers, entangling everything like

<sup>1</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2002; reprint 2003) 8.

<sup>2</sup> Chandani Lokugé, *If the Moon Smiled* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000) 3.

<sup>3</sup> Lokugé 7.

<sup>4</sup> Lokugé 35-36.

lustful cravings.’ She then goes on to allude to Manthri’s ‘crime’ that has ruined her ‘innocent’ son. What is more absurd is that this essentially sexist and patriarchal discourse on women’s ‘purity’ is clothed in the referential apparatus of the Buddhist religio-philosophical doctrine. The offended mother-in-law says glumly, ‘All is a maya.’<sup>5</sup> Mahendra’s mother is unhappy that even the emigration of her son to Australia has not been able to repair the damage done by the impure daughter-in-law.

What is interesting here is that all these Buddhistic translations of essentially secular anxieties and dissatisfactions actually hide a deep-seated postcolonial bourgeois ideology. And it is here that a conventional reading of Manthri’s gendered body becomes problematic. Hermann Hesse writes in *Steppenwolf*:

He (the bourgeois) is ready to be virtuous, but likes to be easy and comfortable in this world as well. In short, his aim is to make a home for himself between two extremes in a temperate zone without violent storms and tempests; and in this he succeeds though it be at the cost of that intensity of life and feeling which an extreme life affords. A man cannot live intensely except at the cost of the self. Now the bourgeois treasures nothing more highly than the self (rudimentary as his may be). And so at the cost of intensity he achieves his own preservation and security.<sup>6</sup>

The central conflict in Lokugé’s novel is between the *intense life* Manthri desires but which is suppressed by the pseudo-Buddhist bourgeois doctrines of her family and community and the obsession with security that her husband and parents exemplify.

The Sri Lankan postcolonial bourgeoisie is uncomfortable with the extremities of both passion and renunciation, both absolute asceticism and absolute pleasure of the senses. And it is not only an affair of the private sphere, but also the central ideology of the nation. On the one hand, the nation is the space of the bourgeoisie’s safety and security. Outside it there are ‘violent storms and tempests.’ But that mythic outside is also reflected inside, within Manthri’s female body filled with the violent passions, the aggressive hunger for the intensity of life that must be controlled by perpetual references to a *bourgeoisified* Buddhism. The mechanisms of controlling the national space and those of controlling the female body are one. On the other hand, the over-renunciative impulses of Buddhist asceticism must be tamed so that *reproduction-as-social-production* is not hampered. It is true that the Buddha’s ‘Middle Way’ is also a compromise between theoretical and practical absolutes in the field of religious life, but it is certainly not the bourgeois middle way Hermann Hesse focuses on and the parents and in-laws of Manthri practise.

The Abhidharmika tradition of the Buddhist thought rejects ‘any claim by others to any kind of independent or persisting human selfhood.’<sup>7</sup> However, the bourgeois Buddhism of Lokuge’s narrative universe cannot reject the essential self of the individual, as the bourgeois ‘treasures nothing more highly than the self.’ This leads to an exclusionary notion of belonging, an obsession with mapping and marginalising.

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<sup>5</sup>Lokugé 122-125.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf* [1927], trans. Basil Creighton, revised by Walter Sorell (London: Penguin, 1965; reprint 2001) 64.

<sup>7</sup> Sue Hamilton, *Indian Philosophy, A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2006) 90.

Without margins, no map is possible. That which has no margins cannot be mapped. Manthri's body is mapped in ritualistic ways – there is the ceremony for her 'auspicious entrance into womanhood,'<sup>8</sup> then there is the search for premarital purity in her body by Mahendra. The Sri Lankan nation-state, which drowns into the darkness of a civil war, is metonymically connected to her body. In *Natural Symbols*, Mary Douglas writes that 'the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.' She goes on to explain, 'all margins are dangerous. ... We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points. ... Each culture has its own special risks and problems. To which particular bodily margins its beliefs attribute power depends on what situation the body is mirroring.'<sup>9</sup> Manthri's body, in the context of *If the Moon Smiled*, also stands for the ethnocentric national imaginary of postcolonial Sri Lanka. It is a plaything in the dominant power structure's play of mapping and marginalisation, the two projects which always go hand in hand, to shore up the status quo.

Manthri's body, however, unlike the geographic territory of the state, is not unconscious; it is a conscious, desiring body; it is open to violent inscriptions from outside, but also capable of a counter-inscription from within, something akin to Gayatri Spivak's 'subaltern writing.'<sup>10</sup> In fact, her resultant madness that concludes the novel can be seen as a radical counter-inscription to the mapping project of the bourgeois cartographers of madness. Her madness, precisely, questions the very notion that madness can be mapped and pinned like national territories. I will return to this point later, after exploring the issues of the body and the body politic.

While analysing the political situation of pre-civil-war Sri Lanka we may ponder over Adriana Cavarero's observation of the paradox involved in the 'metaphorical artifice' of the *body politic*. Cavarero writes in *Stately Bodies*:

The aspired perpetuation of a political form would represent itself from the beginning with the figure of a body that is, by definition, mortal. This is a crucial blindness, which the Greeks had somehow escaped by 'psychologizing' the body. ... A paradox nests inside the metaphorical artifice that adopts a corruptible body in order to evoke a political order desired as stable and long-lasting.<sup>11</sup>

A professedly Buddhist state that moves away from Abhidharmika anti-essentialism towards a rigidly ethnocentric political episteme takes the paradox Cavarero speaks of to its extreme. A religious culture based on the doctrine of universal impermanence attempts to make the body politic 'stable and long-lasting' by creating a seemingly permanent cultural map that marginalises the *other* narratives of the nation. This paradoxical project is metonymically reflected in the construction of the marital *telos* for the female body whose

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<sup>8</sup>Lokugé 19.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Louis Montrose in *The Subject of Elizabeth, Authority, Gender, and Representation* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 116.

<sup>10</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 307-308.

<sup>11</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *Stately Bodies, Literature, Philosophy, and the Question of Gender*, trans. Robert de Lucca and Deanna Shemek (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002) 120.

impermanence is continually asserted. Manthri's body is transient, 'corruptible.' And yet it must remain 'pure' for the deity named 'husband.' In the same way, the purity of the peopled landscape of the nation-state must be preserved by mapping the category of the 'people' in such a way that the outcast individuals or groups produce by their exclusion an illusory demographic centre. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, 'The center itself is marginal ... [H]ow possible is it to undertake a process of decentralization without being made aware of the margins within the center and the centers within the margin?'<sup>12</sup> If the centre is actually *marginal* it requires margins to map out its territory, to demarginalise and centralise itself. In a similar process, the body of Manthri is used as a 'bounded system' by the patriarchal bourgeois order to separate the corruptible boundaries of the body from the *core* essence of purity, the interiority of the non-profane. But if the human individual lacks a stable self, this essence becomes meaningless, as it is not constant. That is why, to preserve the mechanisms of the sexual subordination of women, the Buddhist teratology of purity must be associated with the bourgeois notion of sex as interior essence of which Michel Foucault has made us aware.<sup>13</sup>

Embodiedness entails the pangs of existential closures. The body turns the human being into a limited existent. The body creates passions and yet prevents their explosive outbursts – it is, indeed, a 'bounded system.' As a bounded system, it creates human identities, just as the bounded system of a nation constructs identitarian closets. In her critique of the Greek 'psychologization' of the body, Cavarero says, 'Overall we find suggested a symbolic system tied to the mind's superiority, the impetuous nature of the heart's passions, and the unruliness of sexual urges.'<sup>14</sup> Manthri is the victim of a symbolic system that, like that of the Greeks, tries to denigrate and marginalise 'the heart's passions' and 'the unruliness of sexual urges.' But the kind of phallogocentric (à la Derrida) epistemic violence Manthri has to go through is characteristic of the bourgeois epistemology as Hesse interprets it. Denying the possibility of a unified, stable, singular self, Hesse's narrator in *Steppenwolf* insists:

In reality, however, every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities. ... The delusion (of unity) rests simply upon a false analogy. As a body everyone is single, as a soul never.<sup>15</sup>

Logocentric conceptualisations of the body are paradoxical in that while subordinating the body to the 'soul,' they still imagine a unified soul based on the model of singularity that the body offers. The bodily multiplicities – the passions, the perturbations, the 'tempests' of the body – are thus subordinated to the spatial singularity of the physical body, or, to put it another way, *the body as map*. A map cannot be mad, but madness lurks on its margins, troubling the cartographer.

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<sup>12</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'No Master Territories', *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 1st edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 216.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Repressive Hypothesis', *The Foucault Reader* ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 322-323.

<sup>14</sup> Cavarero 102.

<sup>15</sup> Hesse 71-72.

Actually, in the logocentric imagination, the body and the soul are each other's prison. The body-as-map fails to acknowledge the multiplicity of the bodily selves inhabiting it, and these plural selves struggling within the bodily map are panoptically normalised into the 'bounded system' of the singular 'docile body' (in Foucault's sense of the terms). Douglas writes, 'The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society.'<sup>16</sup> The social cartographers of the 'natural' body create the map of the body deterministically, just as the fundamentalist nationalists map the body of the nation by refusing to pay attention to the spasms of that body. Manthri's body is mapped in the bourgeois Buddhist episteme, but the non-epistemologisable perturbations of that body are not taken into account. As a result, the multiple psycho-physical selves in that rigidly mapped body rebel, leading to an implied condition called madness. In parallel, Sri Lanka, trying to enshrine a rigid cartography of its national demography, is driven towards a civil war, the ultimate outburst of the spasms of the national body that is not and cannot be ruled by a 'soul.' Here we may remember Ernest Renan's comment: 'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.'<sup>17</sup> In this bourgeois construction of the nation as a soul, we find the echoes of both the logocentrism of the Greeks that Cavarero criticises and the 'delusion' Hesse focuses upon. When you say that the nation is a soul, you try to bring that soul into the realm of a 'scientific' and normalising cartography, thus betraying the circularity between a mappable soul and a mappable body.

*The nation is a plural body that is mapped as a soul.*

Manthri names her daughter Nelum, after the lotus. Throughout the novel, the lotus's co-figuration with Manthri's body performs a metonymic, and not merely metaphoric, function. The lotus, which is associated in her father's imagination with 'purity,' becomes a generator of physical passion for Manthri. Lokugé writes:

She would be a lotus. Which would she be – a pure white nelum or a blue manel?

But, do they talk together sometimes? Or kiss? Do they only meditate? They must get so lonely, as they reach alone into the great emptiness. She turns impatiently to touch, to smell, to see. She breaks off a blossom and breathes it. She brushes her lips on purplish-blue petal. Secretly, she touches the stamen with her tongue. She is aware of a luminous inward glow, of water stirring against thighs.<sup>18</sup>

Thus it is that the sign-system of a dominant order can be secretly modified by a 'subaltern writing.' The body can come out of the prison of the *normalised* soul, and the multiple selves can get rid of the prison-map of the body. The lotus is not just a symbol of purity; it also

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003) 65.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Renan, 'What Is a Nation?', trans. Martin Thom, *Nation and Narration* ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 19.

<sup>18</sup> Lokugé 11.

emblematises a visible physical multiplicity. Unlike human flesh that gives the illusion of a fixed fleshy map, the petals are multiple, and ephemeral. And yet this ephemeral nature of the petals is not just associated with the 'great emptiness' in Manthri's imagination, it is symptomatic of the momentary outbursts of passion as well. Besides, the stamen, even if it can be taken as the 'centre' of the flower, is a plural centre and not constrained to signify a phallogocentrically essentialisable core.

Again, in the specific cultural context of India and Sri Lanka, the lotus has other significance, as a common spiritual emblem in both Buddhism and Hinduism. The lotus is especially significant in the context of the Sri Lankan civil war which has often been seen as a conflict between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, because it can carry dual meanings. However, *If the Moon Smiled*, unlike Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, deals with the 'war' only indirectly. But here too what is interesting is the difference between the ethical approach of the men towards the war and that of Manthri, the paradigmatic potential madwoman. The expatriates live in Australia, away from the violence and political madness of Sri Lanka, away from the terrorists and suicide bombers, secure in their diasporic existence. And yet, the news bombards them with images of violence – narratives of dismemberment (both literal and figurative) travel into their homes from abroad. 'We are fortunate to be out of that bloody mess, Mahendra says loudly. Let us count our blessings. No one agrees or disagrees.'<sup>19</sup> It is the supreme instance of the ethical blindness and inhumanity that is fostered by the bourgeois hunger for safety and security, the typically bourgeois fear of 'tempests' and of losing the 'self.'

However, the kind of situation that has emerged in civil war Sri Lanka is, to a great extent, the outcome of the petty-bourgeois postcolonial episteme, typified by Mahendra. The exclusionary cartographic project is afraid of itself when the seething underbelly of the seemingly stable map it has created erupts and begins to undermine the illusion of stability. Mahendra's case is symptomatic of this more general bourgeois fear of the fragments of the nation, to use the expression of Partha Chatterjee – the madness of the margins. The bourgeois then looks for other maps, other images of stability. It is significant that Mahendra, despite his insensitive attitude to the civil war and its madnesses, cherishes a disturbing Sinhalese, Buddhist fundamentalism. He is dismissive of George Keyt's paintings because, as he puts it, 'Keyt is not reflecting our culture or religion here, he's corrupting it.'<sup>20</sup> He is obsessed with his Sinhalese identity in his Australian diasporic existence, though his decision to migrate to Australia was an absolutely monologic one.

Mahendra was not willing to wait for Manthri's consensus but rather coercively persuaded her to 'move on'. His sole point was that 'Australia is a land of opportunity.'<sup>21</sup> But when in the land of opportunity, he is dismissive of the 'western influence' that the Keyt painting exemplifies. He creates his own exclusionary maps even in the Other Country that he has chosen as his diasporic home, lured by the opportunities on offer. Opportunism is the kernel of fundamentalism. Mahendra, like the other Sinhalese ethnocentrists in Australia, is ever anxious to keep his offspring from becoming 'Australian,' and yet, his expectations of

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<sup>19</sup>Lokugé 68.

<sup>20</sup>Lokugé 161.

<sup>21</sup>Lokugé 44.

his son are purely bourgeois ones, and not based on any essentially Sinhalese or Buddhist 'structure of feeling' (à la Raymond Williams).

Manthri's attitude to the civil war however is informed by what Carol Gilligan defines as the 'ethic of care.'<sup>22</sup> She thinks that the diasporic Sinhalese are only trying to 'cover up the guilt.' She remembers the Jataka story where the Bodhisattva transformed into a hare and threw his body into the fire to feed a starving mendicant. Now she perceives that the bourgeois Buddhism of the diasporic Sinhalese has jettisoned the ethic of self-sacrifice and altruism: 'but now, wallowing in our luxuries, we try to salve our conscience by sacrificing our second-hand clothes and excess wealth.'<sup>23</sup> Manthri can, thus, also contemplate the idea of bodily sacrifice, a process of dissolving the 'bounded system' of the body sacrificially, and not suicidally. The immolation and dismemberment of the body are two major symbolic topoi articulated throughout the narrative:

I jolt awake to a chaotic silence. I am a dismembered body. Here a breast, there a floating thigh and swelling lip. I spin a web of desire to entrap the body parts, but they escape and connect high up where I can't reach ... in my dreams I construct a pyre. I extinguish the phantom woman. I would burn with her.<sup>24</sup>

But it is only a dream vision. In reality, the body must remain a bounded system – a living body cannot be without margins, unlimited. But it is also true that multiple selves can lend plurality to the consciousness of the 'bounded' body.

Manthri's uncanny perception of the singular body as a dismembered multiplicity has both positive and negative symbolic implications. In a sense it is the dark mirror of the existential completion that is denied to her through her marriage. In terms of the macropolitical metonym, we can see this as the logical outcome of the obsession with mapping the nation and forgetting the incongruous margins. The margins do eventually turn against the centre and retaliate by dismembering and destabilising the bounded nation-state, through the painful revelation of the multiplicity of the nation's 'souls' within the identifiable map of the body politic. It is the epiphanic, though macabre, moment of the unravelling of the 'paradox' Cavarero speaks of – the paradox of the imagination of a stable political order based on the model of the ephemeral, perishable body. The 'psychologization' of the body politic becomes ineffectual now through the manifestation of the psychic plurality of the body (politic). Suddenly the bourgeois nation finds its breast, thigh and lips hovering in a phantasmagoric limbo. Like Manthri the nation can only try to reunite its body parts through 'a web of desire,' a political eros of relating to the 'fragments,' the 'margins.'

A nation is not an organic entity, neither a body nor a soul, but bodies and souls *articulated*, joined together in an essentially artificial fabric of cohesion. The fabric can be sustained only if the web of desire is strong enough, but when it breaks and the threads fall apart then the 'soul' of the nation has recourse to nothing but hatred and coercion to sustain it in unity. The body of the nation, unlike the Bodhisattva of the Jataka story, refuses to throw itself into the fire to fulfil its being through an altruistic sacrifice. The map of the nation

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<sup>22</sup>Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U P, 1982; reprint, 1993) 73.

<sup>23</sup>Lokugé 68.

<sup>24</sup>Lokugé 42.

obstinately enshrines its illusory immutability, by reifying the margins as *marginal* forever. The margins are imagined as the unruly limbs of the national soul that must be normalised through the psychologistic, or *psychiatric* intervention of the ‘soul,’ that is, the state. But when the margins are rebellious the very ontology of the map is at stake.

Motifs of dismemberment and immolation can also reflect the power of multiple, obstreperous selves to tear apart the seemingly singular body of the nation-state, thereby changing a ‘bounded system’ into an open one and ushering in an emancipatory schizophrenia, the hope of undermining the *body-as-map*. In reconceptualising the body as a sacrificial object Manthri also presents a critique of Buddhism as it is practised in her contemporary Sri Lanka. Richard Gombrich observes that there is a submerged tradition of valorising violence within the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka.<sup>25</sup> In reference to a passage in the *Mahavamsa*, Gombrich remarks, ‘No humane person today can regard the monk’s statement to Dutthagamani that non-Buddhists are no better than animals without disgust.’<sup>26</sup> This kind of religious fundamentalism is challenged by Manthri’s ethic of care, when she ponders on the Jataka story on the Bodhisattva’s sacrifice. While the prevalent religious discourse is content to ritualistically dwell on the transitory nature of the human body, Manthri envisages the possibilities of finding for that ephemeral body a *telos* oriented towards others. And this teleology, which might be characterised as the Bodhisattvic teleology, is different from the petty bourgeois teleology of the happy home and hearth. Later, Manthri goes back to Sri Lanka and stays there to teach ‘the dhamma to some girls orphaned by the war.’ Her effort is directed towards a concrete materialisation of this Bodhisattvic ethic of care. Manthri however fails. She gradually realises that it is impossible for her to subsume her passionate Self into an altruistic vocation.

Manthri’s ‘detached’ world of self-deluding equanimity is troubled by the arrival of her daughter at the temple in Sri Lanka where she teaches the dhamma. Nelum has defied Mahendra’s dictatorial regime and has been living with her Australian boyfriend, David. Manthri is distracted and, propelled by an uncontrollable force, once again returns from ‘detachment’ to ‘desire.’<sup>27</sup> Now, in her imagination, Australia is the place of unfulfilled desires and Sri Lanka a metonym of her detachment. But she realises that this imagination too is self-deluding. She takes the doctrine of karma fatalistically and this fatalism throws her into perpetual melancholia. Of course, the change of places has a negative effect on her, but we need to note that she carries the seeds of madness from Sri Lanka to Australia where they blossom ultimately into absolute schizophrenia.

Madness, perhaps, does not travel from place to place but is everywhere, like the sky, like the intimations of the sea. Lokuge’s novel points to the absurdity of mapping madness and surreptitiously suggests that the ‘sane’ people are but the mad cartographers of an unmappable madness. In Australia too there are compulsive mappers of madness. The young missionaries come to map Manthri’s deviance, to cage her multiple selves into a *converted* ‘docile body’ (à la Michel Foucault). ‘They remind (her) about (her) soul and all that Jesus has sacrificed for it.’<sup>28</sup> But Manthri refuses to be disciplined any more. She also rejects the

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Gombrich, ‘Is the Sri Lankan War a Buddhist Fundamentalism?’ *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka* ed. Mahinda Deegalle (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006) 32.

<sup>26</sup> Gombrich 31.

<sup>27</sup> Lokugé 182-188.

<sup>28</sup> Lokugé 200.

Buddhist discipline that has suppressed her passions in the name of detachment, focussing on the metaphoric purity of the lotus rather than the taste of its stamen. She muses, 'Not my old Buddhist texts. They gather dust on the shelves. When I have the time I will tear them apart page by page. I don't have the energy just now.'<sup>29</sup>

Nelum, her daughter, is a successful careerist, unlike Devake, Manthri's son. Nelum can move towards a meaningful future, she is not trapped in the prison-house of memory as Manthri is. But Manthri's sympathy lies with her son, who is a failure, the other face of this blooming madness. Devake has not become a doctor, he has failed in fulfilling his father's expectations. He is a non-son-like son of his sexist father for whom gender roles are not roles but immutable ontological essences. While Manthri is trapped, due to her repressive disciplining, into the labyrinthine circuits of oppressive memories and frustrated desires, Mahendra, because of his extreme inflexibility, becomes the victim of a different kind of entropy, the entropy of the emigrant whose windowless mental universe never lets him *fully* arrive in the new land. The great patriarch becomes emotionally alienated from his family and turns into a lonely old man in his diasporic home. Sri Lanka becomes a past to which he cannot return. Nor is a *nostos* possible towards his wife. He has *moved on*, and cannot *move back* now.

The whole novel foregrounds the way in which the mappers of madness try to conceal their own intractable insanity. The discipliners of the passionate body, like the discipliners of the passions of the body politic, exploit the elasticity of that desiring body to the point of dismemberment. Dismemberment is seen by them as a disease and not as the rebellion of multiplicity against the monovocal madness of the dominant episteme. Sri Lanka, the map of a geopolitical territory, suddenly becomes an unmappable sea of madness, a dismembered polity. Manthri, the docile girl, after the persistent denial of her bodily passions, gains a peculiar bodily consciousness of dismemberment. And the mappers of madness are all blind to their own insanities in the novel. Manthri's parents fail to discern the acute self-contradiction in their religious episteme and ethical praxis, Mahendra's sexism blinds him to the extent of insanity. The Sri Lankan state tries to discipline the madness of its margins and remains uncritical of its own ethnocentric madness. Madness is nothing but the attempt to map out madness – a project that is perpetually unsuccessful because there are no margins to define human madness. This bleak truth becomes evident through the cartographers of insanity that constellate around Manthri. The reason of state is but the unreason of state, the stability of the bourgeois family or nation is nothing but the instability of togetherness.

While discussing Julia Kristeva's *Women's Time*, Homi Bhabha says, 'The borders of the nation are, Kristeva claims, constantly faced with a double temporality: the process of identity constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical); and the loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative).'<sup>30</sup> We may argue that Manthri's madness occupies the no-man's-land between these two processes of construction and loss of identity. This no-man's-land becomes the semantically productive space of the *madwoman's land*. And this is madness as land, non-belonging as the motherland par excellence, the condition of simultaneously living and dying in the non-territory of the

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<sup>29</sup>Lokugé 200.

<sup>30</sup>Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', *Nation and Narration* ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 304.

Kristevan *chora*. It is not something that can be unproblematically celebrated – nevertheless, it points to the other possibilities of imagining space, of defying the tyranny of the cartographic dominance of the pedagogical over the performative. The madness of a destructive performance at the margins is organically linked to the unreason of the pedagogical at the centre.

Hesse writes:

And if ever the suspicion of their manifold being dawns upon men of unusual powers and of unusually delicate perceptions, so that, as all genius must, they break through the illusion of the unity of the personality and perceive that the self is made up of a bundle of selves, they have only to say so and at once the majority puts them under lock and key, calls science to aid, establishes schizophrenia and protects humanity from the necessity of hearing the cry of truth from the lips of these unfortunate persons.<sup>31</sup>

The bourgeoisie cannot accept the ‘bundle of selves’ as this bundle is unmappable. The bourgeois body is a map overlapping with another map called the soul. But when the map is destroyed and only fragmented, dismembered margins remain, the bourgeois is afraid of monsters. The map of the body and the map of the nation are gods with monsters on their margins, passions lurking behind the furniture of sanity. But Lokuge’s novel shows us an instance of ‘subaltern writing,’ the epistemic agency of a dissolving agent. Foucault writes:

It is at this point that the mirror, as an accomplice, becomes an agent of demystification. ... this, then, is the phase of abasement: presumptuously identified with the object of his delirium, the madman recognizes himself as in a mirror in this madness whose absurd pretensions he has denounced; his solid sovereignty as a subject dissolves in this object he has demystified by accepting it. He is now pitilessly observed by himself. And in the silence of those who represent reason, and who have done nothing but hold up the perilous mirror, he recognizes himself as objectively mad.<sup>32</sup>

Foucault writes in masculine terms. However, Manthri never becomes ‘objectively mad.’ She too has a mirror in her asylum, but she, unlike Foucault’s madman, has never cherished a solid and sovereign subjectivity and hence even the ‘perilous mirror’ cannot make her recognise herself as ‘objectively mad.’ Rather, she can now see through the other people around her: her daughter who visits her, the asylum attendants, the priests. She can figure out the way in which they would try to appropriate the madwoman through their discursive construction of her madness. It is a crucial moment in the novel when madness, rather than seeing itself in the mirror, holds up a mirror to the mappers of madness – and their own madness, couched in the discourse of reason, is left radically unravelled. Manthri’s isolation in the asylum provides her with a critical consciousness to be doubtful of and eventually defy the disciplinary discourses imposed on her.

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<sup>31</sup>Hesse 71.

<sup>32</sup>Michel Foucault, ‘The Birth of the Asylum’, *The Foucault Reader* 153-154.

In this novel the topos of the body as place and that of place as body crisscross in an intricate fashion. The mapping of the individual's body and soul reflects that of the polis and vice versa. Cavarero says that in Plato's *Republic* we find 'a conflict between reason and the impulses, which must be resolved within a hierarchical model containing subordinate and superior parts. This is as true for the individual as it is for the polis.'<sup>33</sup> This essentially Western model of political fabrication, thanks to the colonial epistemic mediation, is enshrined in the postcolonial nation-states in South Asia. The dichotomisation of madness and sanity, reason and impulse, functions to prop up the hierarchical socio-political structures of these nations. The passionate anti-state violence of the 'ultras' (i.e., the so called political extremists) and their barbaric normalisation by the nation states are a phenomenon that is construed by the statist ideology from the perspective of this discourse of madness and sanity that travels from psychology to politics, covering a broad range of conformist ideology.

Cavarero observes that with Plato there emerged a new kind of idea of medicine which was bound with political philosophy in a relationship of cross-fertilisation:

Thus a system of metaphorical exchanges is set up between the two disciplines, in which hierarchical order is defined as health and any disturbance of hierarchy is considered a disease. ... This view marginalizes corporeality and attempts to dominate it, only to find the body constantly within the folds of language and among order's obsessions, lurking in the nightmare of nocturnal impulses that upset not only the Platonic tyrant. These nighttime monsters only seem to be tamed by Aristotle, who models the body definitively on a virile, logical and political specimen, while as always expelling the female body from the city as a failed male, naturally illogical and therefore unpolitical.<sup>34</sup>

I would like to argue that Lokugé deliberately takes up the figure of an excluded female body to question its categorisation as a 'failed male.' In the diasporic context, she is a failed immigrant, but this failure is used by the author to question Mahendra's *success* in the political realm. The 'nightmare of nocturnal impulses' that troubles the bourgeois 'soul' of a postcolonial polity is what confronts the mappers of madness, the postcolonial nationalists. A map metaphysicises the physical, reifies a piece of land into a pictorial abstraction. Cartography's marginalisation of corporeality has manifested itself most gruesomely in the case of the African continent. But it is no less horrible (though perhaps less spectacular) in the South Asian context. The nation was often conceived of as a female body, the so called motherland, by the nationalists during the colonial period. But in the postcolonial nation we see a crafty expulsion of the physical body of the motherland from the cartographic political imaginary, just as the female body is excluded as 'failed male.' Maps defy multiplicity, turning existence into a bounded system. And hence, when the moon smiles upon the mappers of madness, it becomes a figure for the excluded woman with her ethic of care, or the 'motherland' that vanishes under the geo-political map of the 'Nation.'

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<sup>33</sup>Cavarero 103.

<sup>34</sup>Cavarero 103.

### **A Special Note:**

In a paper ('Curry, Mod Oz Style: South Asian-Australian Identities and the Imaginary Homeland') presented at the international conference on 'Globalisation and Postcolonial Writing: An Australia-India Exchange,' organised by the School of English, Communications and Performance Studies, Monash University, Nilanjana Deb, my teacher at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India, offered a nuanced discussion of the religious motifs in this novel by Lokuge. Nevertheless, my approach to the same topos in this article is different from hers in that I try to show how the novel deftly *deconstructs* a religious culture (semantically as well as semiotically) from the perspective of an ostensibly 'mad' woman. The abstract of Deb's paper can be accessed using this link:

<http://arts.monash.edu.au/ecps/assets/docs/abstracts-globalisation-postcolonial-writing.pdf>.

I am thankful to the anonymous peer reviewers of my essay whose advice and suggestions I have followed to modify the preliminary draft of this essay.