

Afterword

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At the water's edge, the ship's flank is seared open. Wielding acetylene torches, the labourers carve up a ship's carcass. Rivets pop as the steel melts and yields to the focused flame that tears at its seams. In this graveyard at the water's edge of Colombo harbour, the ebb and flow of tides bear witness to these processes of systematic dismemberment. This is the scene that opens Suvendrini Perera's uncompromising analysis of the practices of violence that inscribe the end-journeys of refugees desperately seeking sanctuary as they flee the various hells that make life in their countries of origin unlivable. This scene graphically captures the elemental polarities that bookend Perera's profoundly moving essay on refugees, diasporic dispersals, urgent flights and failed arrivals: fire and water, life and death.

In the fraught space that Perera terms the *borderscape*, between fire and water, life and death, she unfolds an 'ethic of inventorying.' In the process, she exposes how the apparatuses of the state are driven by the lethal forces of *overkill*. Overkill names the arsenal of violence unleashed by the state against the most fragile and vulnerable of lives.

After their perilous journeys across the water, the Tamil asylum seekers that Perera identifies as victims of the Australian state's violent practices of overkill are refused the safety of the refuge their hearts so desired. Perera describes Leo Seemanpillai, a 29 year-old Tamil asylum seeker who, in fear of being forcibly returned to the genocidal regime he had so desperately escaped from in Sri Lanka, sets himself alight in the Victorian suburb of Newtown. On the docks of the Sydney suburb of Balmain, this same scene of horror is repeated as another Tamil asylum seeker douses himself with petrol and also sets himself alight. In the wake of these incinerated lives, human ashes drift and settle upon the very quotidian fabric of Australia's suburbs. Perera exposes how these unbearable acts of immolation unfold in the context of unexceptional suburbs—Newtown, Balmain—that secure and reproduce the sovereign logic of the settler-colonial state. Implacable in its targeted destruction of the most fragile and vulnerable of lives, the Australian state justifies this violence under the scandalous banner of 'No Advantage.' As if the asylum seekers desperately fleeing their harrowed plights in search of asylum were laden with so many privileges and advantages on their landfall on this continent. The policy of No Advantage labours to counter the bare fact of the asylum seekers' very survival and landfall with the perverse unleashing of a series of penal laws and punitive practices that, in what Perera calls their 'sheer excess of violence,' works to ensure their final obliteration. No Advantage here signifies the ground zero of a life engulfed by the 'horrorism' of the state's regime of excess violence that defies all bounds of comprehension.

Perera's essay stands as witness to this ground zero of state violence. This ground zero, she shows, is the site where the lives of refugees and asylum seekers are trammelled, violated and then pulverised by the administrative and governmental apparatuses of the Australian state. In the face of the gaping wounds that inscribe this ground zero of saturated violence, Perera challenges her readers to respond to the 'transfixing and immobilising effects of a sovereign violence of excess, overkill and horror.' The ethical impulse that must be mobilised, she suggests, is one that refuses both the closure of these gaping wounds and their consequent forgetting and effacement. The very ethics of this impulse is predicated on mobilising a 'counterpoint to horror's gaping hole or wound.' Perera's essay is the ethical instantiation of this very counterpoint: it embodies the ethical force of a heart that refuses to be silenced and of a tongue that cannot but continue to speak truth to the politics of horror.