



Utopia, Dystopia And Ecotopia In Romesh Gunesequera's Heaven's Edge

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Abstract

'Utopia' is an imaginary place or state of things in which everything is perfect. A perfect society in which everything works and everyone is happy – or at least is supposed to be. Utopias are very common in fiction, especially in science fiction, where authors use them to explore what a perfect society would look like and what the problems might be in such a flawless society. On the other hand, 'Dystopia' means an imagined world or society in which people lead wretched, dehumanized, fearful lives. In a dystopian world, we could also find there is a great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic. It is the opposite of utopia. Both of these societies are imaginary. An ecotopia is a place or state which is utopian from an ecological perspective. Both utopian and dystopia share the characteristics of science fiction and speculative fiction which are usually set in a future, that explores social and political structures.

Introduction

In this article I will examine Romesh Gunesequera's third novel Heaven's Edge published in 2002, which illustrates a diasporic longing for an imaginary homeland, which is so steeped in violence that nostalgia culminates in a montage of utopia and dystopia. In this lyrical prose kind of a novel, the Sri Lankan -born British diasporic writer Gunesequera exhibits a futuristic depiction of an unnamed post-apocalyptic island in the Indian Ocean. Post-apocalyptic denotes or relates to the time following a nuclear war or other catastrophic event. The novel is set on an anonymous, apocalyptic and dystopic island that has been completely devastated by war and nuclear missiles. It is set in a surreal future Sri Lanka where the Civil War hasn't ended but gone on and on, with the country becoming increasingly authoritarian and its environment increasingly despoiled. It is to this dystopian world the protagonist Marc returns, the third- generation Sri Lankan diasporic leaving his London life behind, in order to visit his ancestral homeland and the "unnamed island" where his grandfather Eldon was born and where his father's plane was shot down in flames. He comes with an idea of creating his Eden. His sole purpose of visiting this dystopian world was to gain love and find true meaning in his life. But instead, he soon meets Uva, a self- proclaimed eco-warrior and falls in love with her.

By keeping the island unnamed, the novelist suggests that the island could be any colonized and war-stricken island like Sri Lanka or Mauritius or Fiji or Papua New Guinea. Civil wars and nuclear warfare have ripped off these islands of their original identities, natural ecosystems and bio-diversities leaving behind a shadow of the original paradisiacal surroundings (Pandey 2). Civil war is a type of war that occurs between some groups within the country itself. Sri Lanka's civil war happened from 1983 to 2009. The intention behind the civil war was to create an independent state called Tamil Eelam in the north and east in the country. The civil war initiated by Vellupillai Prabhakaran led the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The fact that caused civil war was the discrimination against the Sri Lankan Tamils by the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan Government. The civil war continued for twenty-six long years. The Sri Lankan military defeated the Tamil Tigers in May 2009. The civil war also affected the environment and economy of the country. The novel is based on violence about the 1971 insurrection and the 1983 anti-Tamil pogroms. This provides a backdrop to Gunasekera's *Heaven's Edge* but through his brilliant writing he creates a utopian and dystopian world with all its romance, perfections, imperfections, chaos, conflicts, environmental degradation, nuclear warfare, devastation and so on. Right from the beginning of its ethnic conflict till date the island of Sri Lanka suffers and faces various problems such as issues of terrorism, human rights, ethnic violence, and political uncertainty. Conflicts opposed Sinhalese and Tamils and were characterized by riots, assassinations and suicide bombings. Such violence and turmoil have had quite an influence on the works of Sri Lankan writers, both at home and abroad. As Minoli Salgado aptly puts it, "after twenty years of sustained violence on an unprecedented scale, the erosion of traditional social and cultural ties, and the collapse of the economy, [...] Sri Lankan literature in English is increasingly read in terms of its relationship to the country's ethnic conflicts and the ability to narrate history as it is being made" ("Writing" 5).

Maya Jaggi, while reviewing the book for *The Guardian Book Review* (10 May 2002), states that despoiled paradises and desecrated Edens have always been at the heart of Romesh Gunasekera's subtle and often elegiac fiction. The novel *Heaven's Edge*, is said to be his most powerful and compelling novel to date, which recreates the mythic fall in the Edenic garden. It shockingly reimagines the author's birthplace, Sri Lanka, as an unnamed tropical Asian island in the near future: familiar yet disturbing. Magical and pervasively violent, a post-nuclear dystopia peopled by traumatized orphans and rebel eco-warriors.

The novel is said to be like a kind of a quest novel which centers on a young quest figure named Marc whose parents are dead and whose associations with Sri Lanka draws the narrator to that world. The novel is situated in the war-torn Sri Lanka of recent memory. In *Heaven's Edge*, the island is but an allegory, a symbol of a place that exists out of time, a "heterotopic site of conflict where discourses are negotiated and tested" (Deckard 177). As a matter of fact, the story takes place on an unnamed island, in an undetermined time, but everything points to the Sri Lankan civil conflict. The only reference the reader is given stands in a video cassette and a letter dated 1998, which is particularly significant as the bomb attack mentioned in the letter can be linked to the January suicide bomb attack on the Temple of Tooth (Gunasekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 17). The 1998 Temple of Tooth attack was an attack on the Temple of Tooth Relic located Kandy, Sri Lanka. The shrine is considered to be important to the Sri Lankan Buddhists, as it houses the relic of the Tooth of The Buddha. In 1998, it was attacked by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist militant organization which fought to create an independent Tamil state in Northern and Eastern parts of the country, from 1983 to 2009. The names of the characters and places suggest that the backdrop is Sri Lanka, and the armed conflict is equally reminiscent of the events in the country, but nowhere does the novel claim that the events take place in Sri Lanka. The narrative is thus framed by the questions raised by Achille Mbembe in his essay on necropolitics (Sabine, Lauret-Taft. "We live in a State of Terror": Transcending Territorial Violence in Romesh Gunasekera's *Heaven's Edge*. *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol.39, no.1, Sep. 2016, pp.47-55). Necropolitics is the use of social and political power to dictate how some people may live and how some must die. Necropolitical power proceeds by a sort of inversion between life and death, as if life was merely deaths medium. It entails the "subjugation of life to the power of death." In the unnamed and unspecified island that Marc visits, life and death depend on the state. Gunasekera's writing attempts to explore the immigrant experience, and trace the impact of the violence and politics that have ravaged the

elysian beauty of his country of origin. Likewise, the narrator Marc desires for an imaginary homeland but to his shock the island presents a pathetic image as it has been totally steeped in violence and civil wars. The migrant characters in the diasporic author's fictions struggle with "the past choked with wars, disputes, borders as pointless as chalk lines in water" (Gunsekera, *The Heaven's Edge*, 102). Inspired by his father's letter, the main protagonist, Marc, goes East, leaving London, to go (back) to his parent's island (Lauret-Taft 47). In postmodern London, he feels alienated from nature and community, oppressed by a sense of acceleration "in a world spinning noisily out of control" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 226). Gunsekera's works are therefore at once British and Sri Lankan in their narration of place and identity. *Heaven's Edge* straddle the different temporal and geographical poles of Britain and Sri Lanka to explore diasporic experiences. The novel prominently, merges the author's characteristic historical fiction with the realms of fantasy and speculative fiction by imagining a violent, dystopian Sri Lankan future. Dislocated from time and space, the novel reads as "a dystopian fantasy set in the future marked by guerrilla warfare and random state violence" (Salgado, *Writing* 18).

Utopian and dystopian fiction are genres of speculative fiction, that explore social and political structures. The word utopia was first used in direct context by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 work *Utopia*. The word utopia resembles both the Greek words *outopos* ("no place"), and *eutopos* ("good place"). Utopia is an imaginary society or community setting wherein the people experience the ideal and most perfect life possible. By contrast, dystopia highlights the complete opposite, which is a place of extremely unpleasant living and working conditions for most people. In *Heaven's Edge*, Gunsekera presents the picture of the unnamed island as both utopian and dystopian worlds. The novel is also interspersed with images of utopian longings and settings. The novel is set thirty years in the future in a place identified only as "the island" resembling Sri Lanka, a place remembered by Marc, the first-person protagonist, as "heaven's edge." He returns to the 'island' sometimes in the future for the first time in his life, "to explore an older terrain and discover for myself what was best to remember, and what might be better to forget, here and in my life" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 5). He also travels to the island in the future to search for his homeland's idealized past "How could I explain how much I wanted from this island? How much it represented of a world I had once believed I could never reach. My father's father was born here. My father died here. I thought I might find some remains. Something, maybe, about who he was and who I am. I came to learn what my life is all about" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 94-95).

When the novel starts, Marc has just left everything behind to follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps. While he converts some of his assets into cash deposits, the clerk tries to warn him about the dangers of the trip he is about to embark on (Lauret-Taft 48). But Marc replies: "that the island I was going to was not an actual war zone anymore" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 19). It's very clear that Marc's innocence is clearly derived from his ancestor's account. By reading the letter which his father Lee – a war pilot had left behind, he feels drawn to the island as if to be a dream place. "he had found a dream, even though Eldon had always insisted his – ours – was an island where dreamers often have to destroy their dreams, if they are not to be destroyed by them" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 19).

Initially, Marc sets out on his journey to the 'island' keeping in his mind what his grandfather Eldon had said about the beautiful island which he really loved and he never returned to. Eldon describes it as a "memory of paradise," "pearl of an island," "island of dreams" etc. "I loved that place, my little Eden, so much more than the big manor house that our lot liked to pretend was the family heritage" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 8). It was also the place "where the first inhabitants of the island had been awakened by butterflies splashing dew at the dawn of time. The dew formed a lake and their wings a floating stairway spiralling up to heaven" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 93). With all these utopian ideas, perfections and perceptions about the island Marc sets out to his grandfather's heavenly paradise through boat. Gunsekera's portrayal of Marc's maiden voyage to his ancestral island in the east signals his touristic outlook. "I was keen to explore it" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 9). He longs to encounter this island as an "exotic spectacle" (Huggan xi) and to find in it a home that is also a "mythic place of desire" (Brah 192) in contrast with the seclusion and drabness of his lonely London life (Murray 43). He states at the very beginning of the novel:

I arrived on this island, by boat, the night of the fullest moon

I had ever seen in my life. The sky was very clear and the sea phosphorescent: the coastline, from a distance, looking entrancing. Two flying fish, accidentally netted, were released by the boatman as we docked at the pier of the Palm Beach Hotel. I thought that was auspicious. The steps down from the jetty were a little rickety and the iron handrail had corroded in several places, but the ground was firm. I stood on the beach and breathed in. I felt elated: this was the moment I had been waiting for. (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 3).

While in the next line this initial beauty of the description of the island is contrasted with the images of “dead urchins” and “broken crabclaws” (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 3) which Marc notices while he climbed up the stairs of the hotel. The image foreshadows the extreme violence. Marc dreams of his grandfather's vision about the island of dreams (a heavenly paradise) but once when he reaches his ancestral homeland, his idea towards the place changes as it seems to be more terrible and deserted. His wish and dream of finding heaven on the island as described by his grandfather, goes vain. However, his convictions and beliefs that he would find the paradisiacal Eden he had been searching for are challenged by the actual realities of the war-torn island. His grandfather had emigrated from the island, refusing to kill for any cause, and his father had returned to it to fight for a cause and die. Now, thirty years in the future, the island is a torn and empty shell. In “The Return to the Natives,” Pascal Zinck underlines that “the novel bears the hallmarks of a tourist narrative with which it struggles. Touristic discourse – masquerading as a traveller's discovery – exists in tension with the anxiety of origins of recovery” (218). The video that prompts the narrator to undertake ‘the journey home’ glamorizes warfare as a ‘sort of disneyland’ (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 153). The diasporic protagonist's search for an Eden is challenged by the realities of the disintegrated island and his search for a utopic paradise meets with failure.

Images of dilapidated ruins and mansions find special mention in the novel. Marc as a tourist in search of the paradise experience, looks for the “hidden charm of a long-suffering but colourful land” (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 9), but finds only desolation. He even comes across few ramshackle bungalows and, within the ramparts of an old fort, a pockmarked shopping mart boasting a drug store and a couple of bazaar stalls with some trinkets and a few essential dry goods like rice, flour and soap. Hardly any people were around. To Marc's eyes, it was an island so infused with myth and mystery. After seeing these devastated and ruined images he examines that, “this was a place, it seemed to me then, devoid of any joy past, present or future” (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 10). He feels that in order to survive in this island, conformity, silence and ignorance a kind of haven was required. He feels totally disappointed with the shattered and mysterious picture of the island.

Gunsekera re-imagines Sri Lanka as a post-war dystopia which in the novel is presented as an unnamed devastated tropical island (Daimari 145). Although Gunsekera leaves the island unnamed, yet it has similarities with Sri Lanka. Minoli Salgado writes in *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*:

The unnamed island of the novel both is and not Sri Lanka, its allegorical connection to the nation disturbed by the social and cultural disembedding that situates it as an imagined territory of desire ruptured by the anonymous forces of guerrilla warfare and the state control that have divided the land into zones of surveillance, resistance and subversion (161).

“We live in a state of terror” (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 27). Once when Marc arrives in the island of his ancestor's birth, he observes the images of dilapidated ruins and houses. He also learns that the country has been deeply wounded, destroyed by the military armed forces. This in fact is seen as an impact of the civil war. Sri Lanka as a “spoiled paradise” is haunted by demonic political forces. *Heaven's Edge* merges the author's characteristic historical fiction with the realms of fantasy and speculative fiction by

imagining a violent, dystopian Sri Lankan future. The militants have increasingly taken to assault, shooting, planting bombs and capturing territories.

Dystopia is the opposite of Utopia, where everything is chaotic and disordered. Dystopian fiction emerged as a response to the utopian. The word dystopia means a 'bad place.' It shows the declination of society. Dystopian society is dehumanized, and faces environmental disasters and war. Utopia is not controlled by constructed government systems. Dystopia is governed by a tyrannical government that keeps the citizens under constant surveillance. In every dystopian story, there is back story of war, revolutions, overpopulation and other disasters. The dystopian depiction is imaginary. In *Heaven's Edge*, Gunesekera locates his narrative in an imaginary, post-nuclear landscape that needs eco-warriors to preserve its scarce vegetation in a country that has disintegrated completely into a war-zone, signaling his fears over the future of his homeland Sri Lanka (Jain 40). As mentioned earlier, Gunesekera's unnamed island is a post-national dystopia reeling from perpetual violence and amnesia. Frequently dystopian books are set in a world that was recently destroyed and not, at this point inhabitable. Nuclear warfare also known as, atomic warfare, is a military conflict or political strategy that deploys nuclear weaponry. The novel describes a global civil war. War and pacifism, and the dilemma of killing for personal and national freedom, are probed in the novel that contains Gunesekera's most explicit violence. It is an island once said to be near the edge of heaven, but now ravaged and despoiled by war. Throughout the novel, the island is shown as an apocalyptic one with all its destructions and turmoils. This deteriorated condition of the island due to the post- civil war conflict and armed forces is clearly portrayed through Uva, an eco-warrior, who explains about the ingrained violence:

War here, like everywhere else, was once about land and identity. But after the death cloud in the south everything changed. You see, we were reshaped by gangsters into new collectives held together only by conscription. You could say myopia, no? Not language, not religion, not any of those outmoded notions of nation. After so many years of fighting, violence became ingrained into our way of life. So now we have only thugs for politicians and tyranny in every tribe. Killers everywhere. One day, maybe, we will learn from each other about something more than an ugly war (Gunesekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 35, 37).

The island's geography itself appears to be so mysterious. Most of what Marc knows, he has heard from Eldon, his grandfather, and belongs to the past. "The shape of the land itself had changed. Political gerrymandering had played socks with every bloody thing" (Gunesekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 8). As the story unravels, signs of terror and conflict become more and more visible. The island's destruction and hunger is evidently portrayed in the novel as soon as Marc enters the Palm Beach Hotel and notices cracks and peels. "When I reached the building I could see that the point on the outside wall had cracked and peeled" (Gunesekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 4). The hotel sign had not been repaired. Even the receptionist at the hotel was found to be rude and not cordial towards Marc. "It was probably permanent hunger, or some parasite in the gut, that made the staff seem so unfriendly" (Gunesekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 7). Marc, with his tourist gaze, disappointedly finds a landscape which had already been destroyed and in decline. His sign of hope to find his grandfather Eldon's "pearl of an island" becomes completely shattered as he lands in a dry and barren landscape filled with decrepit hotels, deserted houses and villages, distressed women, hopeless children and uninhabited jungles. Marc after six days of his landing on the island, decides to go into the scrub to find what he could find there. On his way he even signals some kind of violence and danger by the armed conflicts. "Any restricted area, I reckoned, would be fenced off or something. The rules would become clear, if there was a danger of violation; that seemed to be the way programmes ran everywhere (Gunesekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 11). The island's political infrastructure is completely destroyed and the state is run by army soldiers using terror and economic oppression. In this novel, these kind of violence by the forces are seen through beach executions, forced sterilization, and surveillance of all individuals. "Anything was possible about an island of dreams" (Gunesekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 12). Despite the military plane and the sentry point he

observes, he seems oblivious of the violence that runs on the island. It is only when he ventures into the jungle and meets Uva that his fantasy vision of the island becomes tainted (Lauret-Taft 50). Marc meets Uva an eco-warrior near the duckweed pond in the jungle where she had gone to release a wounded bird she had been nursing. In the toxic island in the aftermath of war, birds have disappeared, fruit is forbidden, water is poisonous, and the State is a violent and authoritarian armed gang (Gurnah 10). Marc befriends Uva and she also reveals to him about the sign of the island's destruction when she questions Marc why he had come here. To which she again replies, "There's nothing left here, you know" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 21). Uva narrates to Marc about how the inhabitants in the island are kept in complete monitoring and inspection by the military forces when she takes him to visit her farm in the middle of the forest. "The path can be tricky, you know, when it gets dark. Sometimes the night patrols are trigger -happy" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 23).

While analyzing *Heaven's Edge* Sharae Deckard in her work *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, And Globalization Exploiting Eden*, has argued that, the island is blighted by political violence and environmental pollution, patrolled by gangs of anti-state guerillas and army soldiers who compete to impose a state of total political and economic oppression. Marc is forbidden to leave his designated hotel, the inhabitants are prohibited to grow gardens, forced instead to purchase food from the warlords; their children are seized to serve in death squads (276).

As the novel progresses, violence escalates and Marc, who is at first just a passerby becomes an active agent. The descriptive elements lay emphasis on an obvious dichotomy between the concrete world of the city, epitomizing the authorities, and the lush jungle, which stands for resistance. Marc is seen held up by the authorities in a "compound of concrete cells. Each with one barred window and a metal door" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 48). Violence seems to spread like the "icy chemical" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 44) used to tranquilize them. The claustrophobic and metallic environment which Marc finds, highlights both the inescapability of violence and the proliferation of weapons. Marc also witnesses the brutal killing of animals by the soldiers while he was under the control of the authorities. The brutal gun shots on the cows that leads to bloodshed, makes Marc to get angry while noticing the slaughtering, harming, torturing and wounding the cows. When he notices this incident, he was remembered of his grandfather Eldon piously quoting a pundit of his youth, "violence can only condemn to more violence" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 51).

Uva's sudden disappearance give her an unreal presence, wished for but impossible to keep, something like intensity itself, always interrupted by the murders and executions, the violence of the times (Gurnah 10). After one of these violent ruptures, Marc is taken into detention and Uva is lost to sight. The very informative piece of dystopian literature, describes an underground world where everything is under strict surveillance and appointed very precisely, as an aftermath of a nuclear disaster. When Uva goes missing, Marc sets out to find her which first takes him to Maravil, a town, which is nothing less than a chthonic place. Maravil, is mentioned as the underworld in the novel, which is one such corrupted and spoiled place. The novel inaugurates another narrative, one of escape and danger, and a descent into an underworld of forgetfulness and genderless passion. The Maravil landscape employed by the novelist symbolizes ruins and decay. At Maravil, there is a market place and an underground mall which is a crowded place and where all types of illegal activities take place. Marc meets Jazz, an effeminate and Uva's friend who works at the bar. Gunsekera plays around with the idea of a postcolonial city built upon the remains of a colonial city and how the postcolonial city is actually a palimpsest of a messy colonial history as the city becomes the centre of dominance, authoritative administration, policing and regimes of surveillance. The character Jazz can be looked as a victim trapped in the folds of a faculty culture which believes in dehumanization of the weak. Maravil, can be looked as a city where the seductive arrangement of commodities and bodies for consumption of the powerful comes from the exploitation and humiliation of the weak (Daimari 148). Jaz is forced to work for reasons of livelihood and security in such a profane underworld. Pascal Zinck according to his observations:

Gunsekera dislocates time and place more radically, the novel combines a chronotopia – an imaginary locale situated in future projected virtual time – and a dystopia – a fictional state turned into chaos and brutality – keeping with the themes of paradise and hell or the post-nuclear holocaust which has 'neutered'

most of the island in the wake of the civil war. Hence, the symbiotic relationship between the toxic landscape and the feral marauding militias that have carved up the island. Maravil, 'the quarantined north resort,' from which violence erupts, comprises an Orwellian detention camp, an ersatz cityscape with a ramshackle market, a military monument displaying 'collective hubris' and a Carnival Mall underworld, only accessible to pass-holders (215-229).

After moving out of Maravil, Marc and his two friends, Jaz and Kris head out in their old cruiser towards a place called Farindola. Maravil is seen as a ruined city. On their way to Farindola, they first reach a cave which serves as their refuge, then an abandoned and plundered village and after that a deserted tea factory. Each one of these spaces can be looked at as a symptom and substance of violence's destructive forces and the fragility of cultures. The cave which provides shelter was a ruin and it provided an image of a vanished past that is beyond repair. Gunsekera, as he paints a post-war dystopia in the novel, he emphasizes are not only on ruins but also on 'ruination.' The island had been ruined to a state of decay, collapse and disintegration. Thus, the ruined landscapes also imply the ruination of people's lives. Ruins as the "leftovers" are the aftershock of violence that hampers people's livelihoods and health (Daimari 149). Ecotopia is an ecologically ideal region of form of society, generally viewed as imaginary. In an ecotopian fiction, the author posits either a utopian or dystopian world revolving around environmental conservation or destruction. In *Heaven's Edge*, Gunsekera by depicting the island as a utopian and dystopian world he also throws light on how the ecological landscapes have been destroyed by the nuclear attack by the armed forces. Uva, the conservationist who tries to safeguard and protect the environment and wildlife.

Gunsekera's awareness of how post-colonial countries have been damaged by imperialism and globalization, damaging not only personal subjectivities, but also ravaging the environment (Deckard 278). Uva's father, an artist and ranger in the Forestry Commission, was inspired by ecology: "You know the very first sanctuaries on earth were on this island" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 35). Her mother was the descendent of "coconut king" entrepreneurs who "cleared forests and planted imperial crops for three generations... making money; taking, never giving" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 36). Together, Uva's parents try to create an Eden-project where they hope to recreate a pre-colonial Buddhist mode of existence (Deckard 278).

Marc, Jaz and Kris are forced into the escape with him. They head for Samandia, a fabled plain where "regeneration" is said to be possible again. By alluding to ancient myths in a futuristic setting, Gunsekera collapses temporal boundaries, enabling a negotiation between imagination and reality. "Underworld," "Moon Plains," and "The Garden," are chapters that track the journey from Maravil, a market town with a subterranean shopping mall to Farindola on the top of the hill, and finally to an hallucinatory garden (Murray 122). Farindola was meant to be a sacred place according to ancient myth. "It was here the first human drowned and ascended to become a god or, according to others, where the first couple – Adam and Eve – were expelled to become real lovers, descending on steps of moral confetti; their loins swollen, their fingers entwined, their lives ignited, Once a realm of pilgrimage and veneration, it was forsaken after the neutering of the south-west, the devastation of the lower rainforests by rogue missiles and botched nuclear deterrents" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 93-94).

The journey across the island's ruined landscape is at the core of the novel. On their way to find Uva, they reach a village. They find abandoned farms and derelict homesteads, empty schools and poisoned water cisterns. "From the office I could see the whole compound: the rusted earth, the trees, the glimmer of the pond on the other side of the road stuffed with grey leaves rotting in the heat" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 101). They also come across some refugee children who were hiding in the jungle because of the attacks. "They lived in woven huts which they dismantled and shifted from time to time, whenever smokeseed poisoned the air, or wailing" (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 103). They meet a fugitive community of women and children, tormented by predatory rapists and kidnappers, and by their own terrified imaginations. The women in the village also told them how their villages were plundered, granaries and fields bombed, men killed, women raped and children deformed by the army. In order to sustain themselves they had to plant rice and vegetables under removable camouflage thatch. The children were forced to become "secret farmers" and all of them were scarred with trauma and pain (Gunsekera, *Heaven's Edge*, 106-108). The traumatized women and the deformed children are seen as the "rot remains" of violence. Gunsekera

through the character Marc, conveys the idea, that if this is the meaning of war, then it is not the tragedy of one place only, but of a ruined and tragic world (Gurnah 10).

Marc feels wholly disappointed and regrets on seeing the pathetic condition of the children and how they had been brutally wounded by the marauders on this island. He laments, “this was not at all what I had wanted to learn. With Uva, I had hoped things might become simple; I suppose nothing ever is. A different time must mean a different place. And yet by being here now I know this land and its tragic past – its ruined children – become, like the whole of the tainted world, as much mine as anybody else’s (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 109). Marc represents the island as fated to violence.

Gunsekera in this novel creates a present that, mutely, narrates the unspeakable horrors of the past and points at the violence lurking in the not-yet narrated future. The violence is very clear in the novel when Jaz and Marc have a rapport with each other about this savagery, “it’s probably just a carter, you know, where some anal dropped another bomb and blew a great big hole in the ground. The whole camp was on the move. Huts were dismantled, carts loaded, cattle harnessed. A sign of catastrophe is viewed through Marc’s words, “I guess they have lived in terror all their lives” (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 111-112). Farindola also turns out to be a ruined place. Actually, the people in *Heaven’s Edge* are showcased as they don’t have any other option but to fall back to caves, mansions, abandoned villages for sustenance, solace and survival. Once when Marc reaches Samandia, he recollects Eldon’s stories, a plain of the imagination and a perfect place, changeable and growing. In Samandia, on his own, waiting for Uva, Marc finds a house of deepest desire (Gurnah 10). He builds a sanctuary. He makes a garden, which is portrayed as a kind of grieving, a mourning. It is from this concept Marc learns that each one has to find for our own survival in this chaotic world.

Survival stories are characterized as stories in which the characters face challenges of the survival of obstacles such as; the elements, animals, an oppressive system, or other people that try to kill them by way of drastic measures. The characters are forced fight against the odds. When Marc finds a wounded monkey, he chooses to nurse rather than kill it, arguing, “Evolution was not the survival of the fittest. Our evolution must come from the survival of the weak, retrieved against the odds” (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 186). Through Marc’s seeming return to nature, the novel describes “an allegorical narrative of a fallen man’s yearning for a reunion with nature” (Deckard 281). He constructs a garden for Uva with dots of butterflies, birds and squirrels and bees overpowering scent of the garden in the middle of the jungle. A garden husbanded for her” (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 193). Marc recreates Samandia as their little Eden and dedicates it to Uva . “I wanted the garden to become her” (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 193). Initially in the novel, we find that Uva was an environmentalist but once when she emerges out of the lake like the reincarnation of Samandia’s spirit (Deckard 284) she turns out be a revolutionist. Uva narrates to Marc about her hiding in a village, from where she had heard about the riot. She becomes an insurgent by abandoning her pacifist visions of eco-resistance. Forming a guerilla militia from orphaned children, she hacks through the jungle, burning bridges, attacking state outposts, refusing to pause even when the children were mutilated by bombs. She also tells Marc how the children were brutally wounded and killed by nuclear bombs. “I forgot the air. We were attacked from the air. I didn’t even know who they were. Everywhere fireballs whooshed. The ground disappeared. Bombing, Burning. Annihilation (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 210). The island is referred to as a jungle. “This is a jungle that must have been fought over a hundred times, if not more” (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 111). Once after witnessing all these chaos in the island Uva tells Marc that “the only war to stop a killer is by killing her, or him. Sometimes you have to sacrifice your innocence to protect this world that you care so much for” (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 228).

At the climax of the novel, we find that Uva sacrifices her own life while fighting against the soldiers who comes to attack herself and Marc in order to destroy their garden and kill them. They also notice that the soldiers also butcher the wounded monkey which Marc nursed. As mentioned earlier, in the dystopian fiction the protagonist are kept under constant surveillance. Likewise, the soldiers had watched all their moves by hiding themselves behind the trees in the garden. The novel’s final image evokes the flaming sword at the gates of Ede: “the whole sky darkened as a legion of trident bats, disturbed from their brooding trees by the gunshots, took to the newly burnt air, drawing a broken eclipse over another fragile world for ever alters; riven” (Gunsekera, *Heaven’s Edge*, 234)

Thus Gunesequera, in *Heaven's Edge* presents a utopian and dystopian island (symbolically Sri Lanka) which was once said to be a heavenly paradise, now turns out to be an island poisoned by nuclear missiles and a degrading and corrupted state infrastructure leading to the de-territorialization of the island.

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