# the south asianist

‘Butterflies taking down giants’: the impact of Facebook on regime transformation in Sri Lanka

Samal V. Hemachandra

# 'Butterflies taking down giants'[1]: the impact of Facebook on regime transformation in Sri Lanka

**SAMAL V. HEMACHANDRA,** *Central European University*

samalvh@yahoo.com

This article examines the impact of social media on regime transformation in Sri Lanka. Specifically, it looks at the role of Facebook in influencing the 2015 presidential election in which President Mahinda Rajapaksa was defeated. This article examines how users reflected on everyday life under the Rajapaksa regime, creating not only a shared narrative of anxieties amid economic and political uncertainty, but also strategies for achieving life-goals. Bringing into conversation three areas of political science, namely radical politics, the role of social media in politics, and popular dystopian discourse, this article draws on posts, videos, images, and comments surrounding the 2015 election, in examining the relationship between online interaction and activism. This article shows how the common expression of dystopian experience helped congeal an alternative vision, which was especially heightened by the possibilities offered by a new presidential election. The title 'butterflies taking down giants' serves as a metaphor for both the surprise defeat of Rajapaksa, but also for the surprising ways in which new media can influence electoral politics.

## Introduction

'Social media is to have fun, not to discuss serious stuff', a woman in her early 20s advised Sri Lankan young people in a political advertisement produced by President Rajapaksa's re-election campaign in 2015. Amidst the very busy period of the national election, Rajapaksa focused great attention to the growing trend of social media becoming an important platform for political discourse. Also prior to the election, President Rajapaksa

---

[1] The title of the article was inspired by the title of a blog post, 'Presidential election advertising battle where giants were brought down by small butterflies,' where the writer observed the significant pressure created by social media on the Rajapaksa regime during the election period (Jayasinghe 2015).

tweeted that some people want an Arab Spring[2] in Sri Lanka (Rajapaksa 2014). Even after the election, the defeated politicians mocked the regime change as a 'Facebook Revolution'. Therefore, it is evident that social media played a key role in mobilizing people against President Rajapaksa. This article posits that Rajapaksa was compelled to pay attention to social media given the significant pressure generated by a new form of online activism by ordinary citizens, especially through the use of Facebook, thus it is an article that explores 'butterflies taking down giants'.

The Sinhala word for 'butterfly', namely *samanalaya* (*samanalayo* in plural) is significant because it also has a strong pejorative colloquial usage which is similar to the obscene word *ponnaya* (Podi Man 2011), that refers to effeminate men and/or individuals that self-identify as gay or transgender. More broadly, the word *samanalaya* is attributed to individuals who do not conform to the normative masculinity represented in the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourse. President Mahinda Rajapaksa, for instance, was considered a model of Sri Lankan masculinity; described by his devotees as 'fearless', 'charismatic', 'well-built', and most importantly, a 'father' with three sons. Men falling short of such characteristics can be portrayed as 'less-than' a man. When we apply this social understanding to the political context, 'butterflies' or *samanalayo* designate 'simply the people who do not count, who have no entitlement to exercise the power of the *arkhê*[3]' (Ranciere 2010:32). In other words, *samanalayo* are individuals who have no power, and thus cannot govern. According to Ranciere, the term 'people' can only be used when these individuals rupture their social order by acting as agents with the power to influence (Ranciere 2010:33).

Due to the rapid growth of the Internet and Facebook in Sri Lanka, and the state's inability (or unwillingness) to control the growth of social media platforms as it has done with the mainstream media, Facebook, has become the most important space for individuals seeking to question the exercising of power by the state. According to Internet World Stats, there were 121,500 internet users in Sri Lanka in 2000, increasing to 5.7 million by November 2015. Of these 5.7 million, Facebook users numbered approximately 3.4 million (Internet World Stats 2015). To put this in context, the total population in 2015 was 20 million. Since all the mainstream media networks, directly or indirectly, were under the Rajapaksa regime, Facebook became a vital space for people to voice their support, or indeed displeasure with Rajapaksa's policies, actions, and inactions. Anti-Rajapaksa discourse, in fact, dominated the political discourse on Facebook by a significant margin. When considering the narrow win by the opposition

---

[2] Arab Spring is well known for its high use of social media, especially Facebook, and some media such as CNN even named it as Facebook revolution (Taylor 2011). However, in Sri Lanka, the popular understanding of Arab Spring is negative due to the destruction resulted in countries like Libya after the involvement of Western powers.

[3] Here, Ranciere continues by suggesting that 'The logic of arkhe thus presupposes that a determinate superiority is exercised over an equally determinate inferiority' (Ranciere 2010: 30).

coalition's 'common candidate' Maithripala Sirisena over President Rajapaksa, the impact of Facebook on the electoral result was strongly felt by the public.

However, popular interpretations of the regime transformation often undervalue the importance of individual online volunteerism. For ardent supporters of the present government, it was a 'revolution' (Wijewardena 2015), and indeed, a 'revolution' from above. In other words, this 'revolution' occurred due to the activities of a few very smart and resourceful politicians. For Rajapaksa devotees, it was a 'fool's rebellion' (Pathirana 2015). The main argument here was that people were simply fooled by the false messages propagated by the opposition. Extreme leftists argue that the regime transformation was simply a change of elites (Chaminda 2015). Still others suggest that the regime transformation occurred because of a conspiracy involving India and Western countries against President Rajapaksa (Kasthurirathna 2016). Though these interpretations have come from antagonistic groups, what they have in common is that they all devalue the importance of voluntary public action, by over-emphasising or glorifying the elite factor. In other words, the logic behind these different interpretations remains the notion that people are generally ignorant, and that politics necessarily entails the manipulation of this ignorance by the elites for their own agendas. Here, I argue that Facebook activism played a critical role beyond its uses as a 'way of having fun', and that social media narratives on Facebook can be read as political texts. Heeding Jacques Ranciere's comment that 'everyone has the same intelligence'[4], I suggest that Facebook users, far from blindly following some elite or foreign conspiracy, succeeded in mounting a significant critique about the present state of the country, articulating with broad resonance everyday lived experience under the Rajapaksa regime. This critical consciousness, in turn, led to campaigning for the alternative 'common candidate' in Sirisena to escape from the Rajapaksa present.

In order to understand people's critical engagement against dominant politics, I used Facebook posts, videos and comments. Here, due to lack of proficiency in Tamil, I was unable to examine the expressions of the Tamil speaking community including both Tamils and Muslims. As a result, my analysis excludes the North and East regions where Tamil is the main language, and instead explains the impact of the anti-Rajapaksa discourse of the Sinhala speaking community in the South in regards to regime transformation.

In the following discussion, I employ the concept of 'dystopia' in examining the language and expressions used in social media political discourse. Here, I concentrate on the political effects of dystopian narratives, by examining how the anti-Rajapaksa discourse on Facebook represented everyday lived experience under the regime. Of particular interest is the way Facebook users employed the concept of dystopia in their own ways to construct a counter-discourse, thus contributing to the defeat the Rajapaksa

---

[4] This idea has been masterfully analysed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991)

regime in the 2015 election. The Sri Lankan case, in many ways, serves as an example to political activism in understanding how the use of social media can strongly influence electoral politics. I first start with a summary of the Rajapaksa regime, the opposition candidate Sirisena's cross-over, and then illustrate how Facebook users developed a common political narrative. The final section then analyses how this understanding of the Rajapaksa regime, articulated in dystopian language, was ultimately used to counter its continuance in the 2015 presidential election.

## Background

Mahinda Rajapaksa became the fifth president of Sri Lanka in 2005 through a controversial presidential election where he won 50.29% of the vote (Department of Elections n.d.). In 2009, after a few months in office, he launched a large (and controversial) military operation against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), that culminated in the annihilation of the LTTE and spelled the end of a 30-year bloody war. Eight months later, Rajapaksa called another presidential election one year ahead of schedule. his time he received 58% of the electoral vote. Three months after the election, he received a clear majority in the 2010 parliamentary election. Rajapaksa was able to create an artificial 2/3 majority with the help of opposition parliamentarians who crossed over to 'strengthen the president's hands'[5]. Therefore, during this time, he seemed invincible due to his popularity. Some Rajapaksa devotees even tattooed the president's face on their bodies to show their love for their leader (see Appendices).

It was evident that there was no strong opposition to President Rajapaksa. However, all this changed when he called a presidential election to be president for the third consecutive term. As a response, the secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)[5], Maithripala Sirisena, crossed over to the opposition, and major opposition parties nominated him as the common candidate. Apart from political parties, many civil activists and organizations supported him. However, the most important element in his campaign was the voluntarism of ordinary people on social media. As a result, the common candidate, won the election defeating President Rajapaksa with a narrow margin.

## Living in a dystopia

After seeing a video of the Sri Lankan police brutally beating up unarmed university students during a protest, one young person shared it on his Facebook page, with the

---

[5] This was the main party of the ruling coalition and President Rajapaksa was the leader of this party.

caption 'hate this present fucking situation'[6] (Annon 2014)[7]. He was fed up with the brutal treatment received by fellow citizens. Most importantly, he could not act against it in the real world because he would be subjected to the same brutal treatment. His expression about the 'present' situation he was living in was not only personal, but one representing the collective experience of many Sri Lankans during the period. In other words, it was an expression of living in a dystopia.

As Fatima Vieira (2010) points out, Thomas More attributed both the meanings of 'non-place' and 'good place' to his use of utopia. Here, the term describes an imaginary space, alternative to the harsh reality being witnessed. Following two World Wars the rise of fascist utopian thinking and especially the idea of a pure human race, the antithesis of utopia, namely 'dystopia' entered the popular discourse. Dystopia has been referred to as 'imaginary places that were worse than real places' (Vieira 2010:17). Expanding the popular understanding of the term, which focuses on imaginary places, some scholars argue the materiality of dystopia and maintain that it 'bears the aspect of lived *experience*' (Gordin, Tilley and Prakash 2010: 2). In other words, dystopia is mostly understood as a past-experience. The brutality of Nazi and Stalinist regimes have offered ample evidence of dystopian lived experience. Thus, although popular understanding of dystopia draws from the past, Annon's expression in his Facebook post, articulates dystopia as a present experience, with an uncertain, although likely grim future. In other words, Annon *is* living in a dystopia. Below I describe how the dystopian present under the Rajapaksa regime generally revolved around two seemingly intractable problems: corruption and state violence.

## Corruption

There was a strong public belief that the Rajapaksa regime was the most corrupt government in the history of post-colonial Sri Lanka. Their crimes, often given in granular detail, were circulated daily on Facebook. Such disseminations gave an air of helpless inevitability, and this was expressed in cynical posts also circulating in the Facebook community. During the election (or indeed one year prior), the government launched a massive election campaign under Rajapaksa's leadership, covering the country in blue[8] flags, posters and cut-outs of the president. But people understood well that politicians could not afford this kind of massive campaigning on their own. Pages, posts and comments, thus, surged reminding users of the corruption in the Rajapaksa regime. One

---

[6] The original quotations extracted from Facebook are indicated in mark and the rest are direct translations from Sinhala to English.

[7] The Facebook data I have used in this article is either posted on timelines with the 'public' option turned on where everyone can see the post; or comments to a public post; or to a post in a public group. In all cases, the identity of the author is visible to everyone.

[8] Blue is the official colour of SLFP.

such page was titled: 'Honourable President of Lamp Posts'[9], basically making fun of the extensive use of public money on posters and cut-outs; but also suggesting he had become the president only for the lamp posts, and not the people of Sri Lanka. Also, there were many large cut-outs on high-tension pillars in the middle of paddy fields. This was mocked, in one instance, by a picture post which stated: 'now farmers don't need strawmen…that's because Mahinda [Rajapaksa] is in every high-tension pillar' (Noaddress 2014). Ruwan Bandara shared this with a caption: 'the great king of cut out as the strawman in padifield [paddy field]!' (Bandara 2014) – which reflected the common mentality towards these posters and cut-out campaigns.

Another important factor about corruption was the abuse of public property in the election. For example, there was a video of a worker from the Road Development Authority of Sri Lanka, sticking posters of President Rajapaksa on walls. The video became viral on Facebook (Newsfirst.lk 2014a). Initially, it was broadcasted in a television news segment and then immediately posted on Facebook. What made this video viral on Facebook was the worker's clear displeasure with what he was doing. Speaking directly to the camera he stated:[10] 'we are only working for our salary. We work on roads…there are thousands of posters left to stick. If someone can remove these [posters], it is a big help to me. When you give me money, I have to do whatever you say right? This is a huge pain […] If we say no we will lose our jobs and our salary'.

The video went 'viral' because it had broad resonance in the populace. The act of sharing the video on personal timelines was a form of commiserating with the experience of the worker because they too had experienced it. Put differently, it seemed to encapsulate a common experience, thus requiring little or no additional comment. One user stated 'when we say no, we lose the job and the salary'… shame on you [Rajapaksa], this is how you hang in walls and lamp posts in the whole Sri Lanka' (Sachindra 2014). Another sighed 'it is the poor who suffer from everything' (Jayasooriya 2014). Sumithraarachchi, who was extremely frustrated about this injustice did not allow his lack of command of English to stop him from expressing his thoughts on this present: 'This is how they treat for the inacent pour [sic] people……. They dont [sic] want to du [sic] this job… but they have to……camand [sic] from Rajapaksa rajimi [sic]…this is [a] true storey [sic]..' (Sumithraarachchi 2014). In contrast to these people, Faleel Marikkar who was a CEO of a hotel network and living in the United Kingdom, also shared the video stating 'How people are forced to work for President!!!!' (2014). The same expression with much more anger was illustrated in a post by a user named Keerthisinghe: 'Fuck you Mahinda [Rajapaksa] why [are] you using this [these] poor people for your campaign by force?' (2014).

---

[9] This page has been deleted by the admins.
[10] His face was blurred to conceal his identity.

The social background of these individuals provides an important picture of radical politics. These individuals cannot be understood from the concept of class in traditional Marxism because as it is clearly visible, they did not belong to a homogenous entity. For example, in traditional Marxism, certain classes have certain features which assign a place in the social hierarchy. Instead, this group of individuals came from different social strata. For instance, some spoke good English[11] and some did not, some were rich and some were poor, some were educated and some were not. This heterogeneous complexity of individuals was a key feature of Facebook activism. However, what united them all was their common understanding of how hard their present was and their common goal of working together to change it and achieve a relatively good future.

This video of the worker of the Road Development Authority reminded most people how miserable their lives were under the Rajapaksa regime. Gayanath Pradeep pointed out to everyone that regardless of whether you were pro- or anti-Rajapaksa, no one was safe under his regime. He stated 'today the majority of public and private sector workers as well as people who vehemently defend MaRa's[12] dictatorial system have to please MaRa to save their jobs' (2014). This video reminded Jagath Koswatta that 'we have to live in a country like this' (2014). Young Nabeel Nawshad, clearly dissatisfied with being unable to do anything against this injustice, stated while sharing 'Feeling guilty on the Present situation of our country Mr…Mahinda Rajapaksa' (2014). He tagged President Rajapaksa's official page to show his displeasure. Interestingly, he had used 'Mr.' to address the president the way he would address any ordinary person, thus challenging the president's image of the great father (*appachchi*) or the great king (*maha raja*) In other words, he challenged the hegemony of Rajapaksa by considering President Rajapaksa not a special person, but another citizen of the country. Also, the fact that he used dots in between Mr. and Mahinda Rajapaksa, may be to indicate that there is a gap between the character of a mister and the corrupted character of the president

## Violence

From the perspective of oppression, the Rajapaksa regime received enormous criticism for its abuse of power. Two incidents during the latter part of the election campaign captured the heart of the anti-Rajapaksa Facebook campaigns. One was the brutal police attack on protesting students of Higher National Diploma on Accountancy (HNDA). Police had been using extensive violence against protests perceived to threaten the government during the Rajapaksa period. The police brutally beat with batons both the male and female HDNA students fleeing from the scene. Since this happened two weeks

---

[11] English language determines one's place in the social hierarchy in Sri Lanka.
[12] MaRa is the shorter version of *Ma*hinda *Ra*japaksa. People used this word to humiliate the president by not addressing him with his full name. Also, *mara* in Sinhala refers to murdering. So by using it, people try to reflect the brutality of his rule as well.

prior to the election, it received massive attention from the Facebook community. The title of this video was 'how thugs of Rajapaksa assault HNDA students brutally [.] Hey king you are definitely going to suffer for this' (LankaFocusNews 2014).

One young person described the violence people received from the police, when asking for their rights, with the following words: 'When people ask for water they get beaten up, when farmers ask for reliefs they get beaten up, when students ask for education they get beaten up. What the hell is this?' (Favaz 2014). Another youth was more concerned about his children's future: 'Pls [*sic*] take few secs [*sic*] to listen to this…This can be our children's future one day' (Jumly 2014). When Dhananjaya, another youth, saw the video when his (Facebook) friend shared it, he understood why these students got such a cruel beating: 'These tears are worth a lot boys. You are poor…So suffer forever […] give the vote to the great king' (2014). His statement 'give the vote to the great king' of course is reflective of his disillusionment in the political system. Jagath Samantha aptly sums up this general cynicism when he asks: 'Ohhh… when can we smile in this country?' (2014).

Another incident that grabbed the attention of Facebook users during the election period was the physical attack on a group of artists and social activists named *Aluth Parapura* (New Generation). As they were performing to support the common candidate in a small town called Kumbukgete in Kurunegala district,  they were physically assaulted by a provincial councillor of the ruling party, along with a group of Rajapaksa supporters. As *Aluth Parapura* was mainly composed of young social media activists, they were able to generate massive support on Facebook against the attack. However, before this incident, veteran artist Jayathilaka Bandara, was subjected to two physical assaults by Rajapaksa's henchmen in Eppawala and Hambanthota. The attack on *Aluth Parapura* was thus not uncommon for people who were campaigning against the president, but what was new was that *Aluth Parapura* managed to obtain massive support both in some traditional media outlets, and especially in social media. The video which showed the assault (Newsfirst.lk 2014b) received massive publicity especially on Facebook.

Since this incident was extremely close to the date of the election, people were creating an 'us vs them' dichotomy and categorising and identifying others in relation to the violence in the now widely familiar video footage. The artists were beaten up by political 'thugs', and were thus heralded as 'true artists'; and artists that supported President Rajapaksa were labelled 'buglers' (Ranathunga 2014). Another quote stated that 'animals of Blue Brigade attacked artists' (Guruge 2014). Commenting on Guruge's  post, a university lecturer, Daya Dissanayake, called these 'thugs' the 'Blue Dogs' Brigade' (Dissanayake 2014).

The characterisation of supporters of Rajapaksa as 'animals' is an interesting element in the anti-Rajapaksa discourse, and merits discussion. By 'de-humanising' Rajapaksa

supporters, anti-Rajapaksa discourse defined anti-Rajapaksa supporters as 'humans'. Here animals, and especially predators, symbolised the irrational, barbaric and aggressive behaviour of Rajapaksa supporters; while their 'human' opponents were rational, civilized and peaceful. This introduced a new layer of meaning to anti-Rajapaksa discourse, which expressed a 'reality' in which animals had been ruling humans, and that this was unnatural. This discursive technique was also indicative of the extent of alienation felt by the large sectors of the public, and expressed in myriad, nuanced, and often not-so-nuanced ways online. Ashan Chaturanga summed up the whole situation in two words: 'The reality' (2014).

The Rajapaksa regime sought to maintain their hold, and the hierarchical order of the society through violent means (Ranciere 1992). When students, whose role in the Rajapaksa hierarchy was to study, suddenly demanded solutions to their problems; or when artists, meant to lend support to the Rajapaksa regime, suddenly campaigned against injustice, they were swiftly, resolutely, and violently reminded of their place, and their role in the hierarchy. That Facebook provided a space where discontent could be expressed with 'impunity' was anathema. As illustrated in the following section, the dissatisfaction with the present now circulating widely online, readily accessible, and unregulated by the Rajapaksa regime, was soon masterfully employed by campaigners of the common candidate and civil leaders.

## The burning house

The coherent picture of the dystopian present mainly represented two events. One was the song, 'Aye aye noma iwasan' (Don't tolerate again), which was one of the official songs of the common candidate campaign. The other was the metaphor of 'the burning house' which was extracted from a poem of Bertolt Brecht and used during a television debate by a civil activist who campaigned for the common candidate. The 'Aye aye noma iwasan' song became extremely popular in Facebook as well as other media, because it masterfully captured the dissatisfaction of the anti-Rajapaksa discourse with the Rajapaksa present. It had a nice melody and the lyrics perfectly addressed the frustration ordinary people had. Also, the video of this song reminded of the dystopian reality. The translation of the song goes like this:

> We were told lies,
> And we fall for it every time.
> We are in a middle of a desert, going nowhere.
> Time passes but no pride.
> Dreams are crushed.
> We have been wrong.
> Toleration…

Don't ever, don't ever tolerate [this again].
Raise your heads who have courage. //

Toleration has finished…
Face shows frustration.
Tiredness is in everyone's face.
When people who tolerate, suffer
The whole world has gone forward.
Don't ever tolerate this again.
Raise your heads who have hearts//
(translation is mine)

This song claims that, under this regime, people have no dignity, no happiness, but only helplessness, frustration and never ending tolerance to injustice. The reality they were facing was nameda desert, a place where no life is permitted. When people consider Sri Lanka, an island with beautiful rivers, waterfalls and vegetation, a desert, it reflects what has happened to their lives under this regime. These lyrics combined past, present and future and illustrated the Rajapaksa regime an ahistorical entity. In other words, under the Rajapaksa regime, time has become static. The past, the present and the future became one temporal context. For example, in the past, people were deceived by lies of a better future and what they experienced was misery. Therefore, the present remains hopeless. The misery was the same in the present as it was in the past. Nothing has changed. Also, the future would be the same as the past and the present because all the dreams have been crushed. As Marge Piercy points out, '[d]reams are the fire in us' (in Sargent 1994: 2). Politically speaking, dreams will, either individually or collectively, envision a better future with regard to a bad present. In other words, '[i]f we are frustrated by something in our society, we dream of a society in which it is corrected' (Sargent 1994: 4). And even though our dreams are fulfilled, '[w]e still dream at least in part because, content, we are capable of recognizing that others are not and feel that others should also be fulfilled' (Sargent 1994: 4). However, the song reminded people that they did not have dreams of a better future and as a result, they were stuck in this dystopian present.

The videos of this song captured the meaning of this dystopia and forwarded a visual representation of that dystopia. There are two official versions of this video. One is a shorter version of the original song which is used as a television advertisement (Young Generation Sri Lanka 2014). The shorter video is a choreographed version. It reconstructed four main incidents that happened in the last decade. They were: the Rajapaksa supporters throwing stones at a peaceful protest of fishermen; the state violence on the protest in Rathupaswala which resulted in killing few innocent civilians, farmers protesting for a better price for their products and the constant brutal police attacks on university students. It resembled state brutality and oppression on non-violent

protests of civilians. In the full version, the complete video is created through actual footages of government brutality available on YouTube (UPFA - A Brighter Future 2014a). In the beginning of the song, it stated that all the rights of these footages remained with the people who uploaded them to YouTube. In other words, the music video portrayed life under the Rajapaksa regime through the perspective of peoples' experiences. Unlike in the shorter version, the longer version managed to cover most of the important incidents which reflected the brutality of the Rajapaksa regime including police brutality, protests of farmers and university lecturers and video clips of the families of forcefully disappeared people, deaths of unarmed protestors.

These versions, mainly the longer one, have been circulated and recirculated on official Facebook pages of the common candidate, as well as, on personal accounts of Facebook users (UPFA - A Brighter Future 2014a, 2014b). One concurred with the recreation of the video by stating 'True Stories' (Vanarkadie 2014) and another, 'REAL VEDIO [sic]' (Kumarawardana 2014). Dikkumbura, a youth, who sympathized with the pain, experienced by the people in the video, stated while sharing it on his timeline, 'Sorry to say [sic] this is my country' (Dikkumbura 2014).

However, the most accurate metaphor to describe the dystopian nature of the Rajapaksa present was introduced by a prominent political activist and a civil leader, Gamini Viyangoda. In a television debate, he used the Sinhala translation of the poem, 'The Buddha's Parable of the Burning House', written by Bertolt Brecht, and this became viral in Facebook (We Are Ready 2014a). Since it was a story of Buddha, this reached a wide population in Sri Lanka. The poem began like this:

> Lately I saw a house. It was burning. The flames
> Licked at its roof. I went up close and observed
> That there were people still inside. I opened the door and called
> Out to them that the roof was ablaze, so exhorting them
> To leave at once. But those people
> Seemed in no hurry. One of them,
> When the heat was already scorching his eyebrows,
> Asked me what it was like outside, whether it wasn't raining
> Whether the wind wasn't blowing perhaps, Whether there was
> Another house for them, and more of this kind
> (Brecht 2011)

Here Viyangoda compared the Rajapaksha regime to a burning house. There are people inside this burning house and they are almost about to burn, yet do nothing to survive. When Buddha opens the door and screams to them to come out, they stay emotionlessly and inquire about the positives and negatives of their alternatives. This showed how numb people had become under the Rajapaksa regime. They had no hope for a better future and were waiting to be burnt by the flames. As illustrated above, the

past, the present and the future had become a static entity where even a small change was impossible to imagine. Since the poem is written from Buddha's point of view or, in other words, from a point of view of an outsider who sees the burning house and what is about to happen to the people inside, Viyangoda attempted to point out the way an outsider of the Rajapaksa discourse sees the reality of their present. Akila Rupasingha, a youth, explained his expression to this video while sharing it on his timeline which recollected the general attitude about this video: 'Just WOW…The perfect explanation…' (Rupasingha 2014).

This is how the anti-Rajapaksa discourse understood and represented the experience of living under the Rajapaksa regime. It was living like senseless humans while everything around them was burning (or falling apart). And if they stayed doing nothing as they had been throughout the Rajapaksa regime, all of them would be destroyed. What can we do to escape from this burning house?

## The 'common candidate' campaign

One could argue that there was a general atmosphere of resignation regarding the capacity for politics to be an agent of change. Even showing signs of discontent could trigger violent reprisal from Rajapaksa's henchmen. Therefore, the general attitude regarding President Rajapaksa's governance was that, corrupt and violent as he may be, there was no obvious or viable alternative. This sense of resignation rather assumed that the long tenure of President Rajapaksa's regime was not only a given, but inevitable.

However, this atmosphere of impotence shifted dramatically when Rajapaksa called the presidential election on January 8th 2015. When the presidential election was announced, the general secretary of SLFP, Maithripala Sirisena, along with a few key cabinet ministers, crossed over from the ruling alliance to the opposition, and the main opposition political parties named him the 'common candidate' of the opposition. Unlike other politicians in the ruling alliance, Sirisena had a low profile though he was the general secretary of SLFP. This was due in no large part to Rajapaksa's domination of the political limelight. Sirisena also had a relatively clean record on corruption and misuse of state power. Therefore, in public life, Sirisena seemed to be a relatively *good* politician when compared to Rajapaksa.

Social media users started to use 'My3' rather than 'Maithri' (Sirisena's first name) to address the new candidate. An expression of endearment, it also indicated that this candidate was 'closer' to them than the president. The growing optimism in the possibility of defeating Rajapaksa was soon clearly visible online. However, Ruwan Nelu saw the danger of a complacent anti-Rajapaksa campaign due to the common candidate phenomena. Under the title, 'this is a moment to stop telling love stories', he stated:

The opposition won the common candidate 'game'. Some act as they have won the whole presidential election. To bring a person no one expected as the common candidate is a significant step. But this is not a duel as in the 18th century. Instead of two duelists, there are the spectators who have to vote to win or lose. Also, the people who win in a game are the players, not the spectators who watched it. In order to maintain fun [*athal nokedimata*] even after the party, there has to be a people's action for people's expectations in this fight (Nelu 2014).

He made an interesting observation about the voters, whom he described as spectators who watched politics from a distance rather than actors who critically and dynamically engaged in it. While sharing Nelu's post on his timeline, Sameera Samarasinghe stated: 'Actually this was the time for these people to be upgraded from followers to 'citizens'' (Samarasinghe 2014). Nelu and Samarasinghe both agreed that this was not the time for people to wait for others to fulfil their dream of a better future; instead they should act for themselves to achieve their own dreams.

## Was My3 the saviour?

When Sirisena became the common candidate, people discussed on Facebook his credibility to represent people because he held a prominent place in the government, yet he did not take any substantive action against the wrongdoings of the regime. Many expressed how they felt about Sirisena on Facebook. Chameera Dedduwage, a well-known figure on Facebook, described Sirisena, in one of his comments to his own post, as 'a muddy pothole in the middle of a desert'. He further stated, 'in this moment, he [Sirisena] is not the best solution…but the [only] alternative [we have] is him' (Dedduwage 2014a). Nuwan Malaka put this idea bluntly: 'I do not say that Maithripala Yapa Sirisena is a lotus of this political mire [or] the Bosath13 from [the heaven named] Tauthisa. It is a joke to find a virgin in the brothel called Sri Lankan politics' (Malaka 2014).

Therefore, it was evident that people were not committing their efforts to replace Rajapaksa with Sirisena, but to have the policies that he agreed to implement. Dhanushka Premarathna commented to a post on a Facebook group which stated that Rajapaksa and Sirisena were the same: 'my3 should be given power to achieve essential political reforms for the country. If he did not do them, he would fall into the bin of history. Even if he does not do these [policies], still that ideology would win because people gave him the power in order to do those things' (Premarathna 2014). Commenting to the same post, Weeraparakrama Narendrasinghe described these essential reforms as a wish 'to overthrow the bandit king, to abolish the executive system [and] establish independent commissions…' (Narendrasinghe 2014).

---

13 A person who will be Buddha in a future birth.

Kasun Pathirana, a young radical, articulated these ideas in an intellectual fashion in one of his Facebook posts. He pointed out that the cult of personalities had been a fundamental factor in Sri Lanka politics. Therefore, rather than following personalities, he stated 'the common candidate is not an individual person but a series of political principles which originated after the common consent of antagonistic political parties, groups [and] organizations. As a result, [we] have to agree not on political characters but on principles' (Pathirana 2014).

Promoting political principles as described here clearly questions W. Lance Bennett's claim that we live in 'an era of personalized politics' (2012: 20). He argues 'individuals increasingly code their personal politics through personal lifestyle values' (2012: 22). For example, questions like how environmental or worker friendly are my personal belongings such as vehicles and clothes, have dominated social media activism. However, in the Sri Lankan context, Facebook activism has gone beyond this personalized aspect of social media politics. They were demanding a good life against the dystopian present they were witnessing.

Because of the uncertainty of how Sirisena would act after obtaining power, many Facebook activists did not bank their goals on him. The best way to understand the Sirisena phenomena is that people used Sirisena as a tool to escape from the Rajapaksa dystopia. Therefore, as Nirmal Dewasiri, a university lecturer and a prominent civil leader, once stated, defeating Rajapaksa and his regime was most important. If Sirisena had fulfilled at least some of his promises, then it would be a bonus[14]. Ravisha Thilakawardana, another prominent Facebook activist, posted a quotation on his timeline that was taken from the blog of Chinthana Dharmadasa and which aptly articulated the dynamism of the common candidate movement.

> This is why I like the common candidate movement. It is again a hope. It is an anonymous revolution. Who is the common candidate, will he win or will Mahinda be defeated are not most important. The most important thing is that there is at least a small number of people who can think, question and oppose. That change is enough for us to celebrate. (Thilakawardana 2014).

Therefore, was Sirisena the saviour? The answer would be 'wrong question'. People knew how corrupt Sri Lankan politics was from their own experiences. Therefore, unlike with previous elections, people were promoting principles. Since Facebook allowed a large number of people to express their opinions, promoting principles became immensely popular among the Facebook community. As a result, the common candidate movement did not revolve around individuals but around principles and Sirisena was considered as a tool to achieve these principles.

---

[14] Through a personal correspondence with Nirmal Dewasiri.

## Individual volunteerism

As discussed above, people did not rally around Sirisena, instead they took the responsibility for overthrowing President Rajapaksa into their own hands. By forming loose collectives, individuals debated, discussed, shared information, as well as, their opinions and pressurized others, who were undecided for whom to vote to vote for Sirisena. This volunteer activism flourished on Facebook, and interestingly, it was highly independent from Sirisena's official campaign. The dynamism of this activism surprised not only the organizers of Sirisena's campaign but also the organizers of the Rajapaksa campaign. For example, one of the leading Rajapaksa campaigners who wanted to be anonymous, stated '[w]e could not even match the scale of social media campaigns of Maithree' (Kalansooriya 2014). Also, Karu Paranawithana, now a deputy minister of the Sirisena government, stated during the election campaign, '[i]t [social media campaign] is entirely a social mobilization and we have nothing to do with these social media campaigners' (Kalansooriya 2014).

Clay Shirky (2011) points out two positive factors created by cyber space. One is that it has become a source of information. For example, videos and posts on current issues circulated and recirculated among Facebook users. As a result, television channels post more videos and posts on their official Facebook pages, to popularize their channels. Moreover, Facebook has become the quickest way to obtain news due to people's activities such as posting and video uploading. The other factor is that Facebook allows people to express their thoughts. In other words, it has become a platform to discuss, debate and express ideas on different topics which have been suppressed on mainstream media. Between 2010 and 2015, there was no space in Sri Lankan mainstream media for peoples' grievances. For example, In Freedom House (2014) rankings Sri Lanka has been categorized as 'Not Free' under freedom of the press category for the year 2013. Therefore, during the electoral campaign (and even before that), people used this space to show their displeasure by either commenting or sharing humorous posts. So, Facebook became an excellent mechanism for connecting public grievances in Sri Lanka.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no one particular moment for the beginning of Facebook activism against Rajapaksa. Some had started this mission way before Sirisena's crossover, and some joined the Facebook campaigns later. Also, this Facebook activism happened in different spaces and in different forms and sometimes independently of one another. This gave the whole gamut of social media activism an anarchistic tone, with no identifiable centre directing activities.

On Facebook, censored subjects such as the Rajapaksa family and the Rajapaksa administration had been heavily criticised. In the mainstream media, there was some news on the Rajapaksa family's questionable behaviour. However, the media was silent on Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the youngest brother of the president. It was widely believed that Gotabaya indeed had great influence in state repression. Conversely, Facebook

seemed to evade their control, as a number of incidents specifically regarding Gotabaya Rajapaksa circulated widely, and were openly discussed and debated. For example, the mainstream media largely stayed away from the District Court of Mount Lavinia in Colombo, in which Gotabaya testified. One reporter that braved the event was barred by police from entering to video the proceedings. He did, however, manage to record all the police interventions, and this footage was posted on Facebook (Alokaya 2014). Facebook users added captions when sharing the video footage, openly showing disdain for the police behaviour. Captions, for instance, read: 'is Gota the almighty god?'[15]; 'Don't get into trouble later after recording Gota'; and 'They say people who have brains don't record Gota'. It is also important to note the police incident was not mentioned by any media channels. Another popular video featured Gotabaya threatening via mobile phone a senior police officer, warning him to withdraw all the police from protecting the UN head office from a pro government rally (UPFA-A Brighter Future 2014c). This video showed to the extent the police had been politicised. The video was immensely popular on Facebook and received approximately 270,000 views, 2500 likes and 18,000 shares. Also, there were another 150 comments, most of them showing their discontent with the incident. Social media users openly criticised Gotabaya Rajapaksa's place in the Rajapaksa hierarchy – a position that had been beyond reach for ordinary people.

Apart from being a platform to voice individual opinions, Facebook, as discussed above, became a space to share and receive the latest political news which had been censored in the mainstream media. Mostly, such stories circulated on Facebook as chatter as, due to strong censorship, it was extremely difficult to verify their authenticity. However, the informal sharing of anecdotes and comments was seen as more reliable than news received from mainstream media. For example, a parliamentarian of the ruling party who was close to the Rajapaksa family, physically assaulted the Sri Lankan high commissioner in the United Kingdom in 2014. The parliamentarian was well known for his involvement in corruption, while the high commissioner was largely respected. The incident first appeared on Facebook as gossip. However, later, it was verified and was even debated in parliament (Ape Media Social Media 2014).

Facebook activism introduced a new type of collectivism to Sri Lankan politics. As Wellman (2001) points out, 'place' had become an insignificant factor due to the emergence of Facebook. This can be termed as 'networked individualism', a new type of a collectivism which has emerged due to social media politics. As Wellman describes, networked individualism is the transformation of communication from 'place to place' to 'person to person'. This means that previously 'place' (as a spatial context) was a major element in collective action. But with the rise of social media, the importance of 'place' has been transformed to the person. In other words, 'place' is no longer a factor for activism because through social media, individuals can be a part of a collective action

---

[15]Gota is the nick name for Gotabaya Rajapaksha.

without physically *being* in the place. In this new collectivism, the importance of being in a place where the real action was happening decreased dramatically. For example, '[s]everal individuals in Europe had volunteered to keep the page [that is 'Rajapaksa, We are Ready' one of the most influential political pages during the election] alive when the Sri Lankan team goes to sleep' (Kalansooriya 2014). In other words, people who were keen to defeat the Rajapaksa regime did not have to be in Sri Lanka to support the struggle.

The origin of 'Rajapaksa, We are Ready' Facebook page, was a spontaneous decision among a few Facebook activists. Ravisha Thilakawardana, one of the founders of this page, described it in the following words: 'We were a group of unknown individuals who used to chat on socio-political issues on Facebook. But a few of us gathered at a bar on the night of Maithri's cross over and thought we should do something. When we finished a couple of beer bottles, the Facebook page was already up and running' (Kalansooriya 2014). When 'Rajapaksa, We are Ready' page became popular in a short time, Sirisena campaigners requested this group to join the official Facebook page of Sirisena, 'UPFA-A Brighter Future' and, due to this, this page became one of the most influential pages during the election period. In a post roughly one year after the calling of the presidential election, UPFA-A Brighter Future page stated that it received only 40000 likes during the period from 2010 to 21st November 2014. The number of likes had increased up to 357,000 during one year; and only in the night of January 8th 2015, the page received 18,000 likes. In some weeks during the election, the number of total post reach[16] went as high as 15 million[17] (UPFA-A Brighter Future 2015).

Since there were no reliable election polls to predict the election result, Chameera Dedduwage took this matter in his own hands. On 12th December, 2014, while travelling from Bemmulla to Pettah by train, roughly a 30km distance, he listened to the political discussions among the passengers taking place on that journey and categorized for whom these passengers might vote. He assumed 4 passengers would vote for the president and more than 11 passengers for the common candidate. Another 4 passengers did not want to vote for anyone or rejected these two candidates. Interestingly, 16 passengers did not participate in these discussions (Dedduwage 2014b). Commenting to this post, Nihal Priyashantha described the political composition of 50 people of his workplace as 62% for the common candidate, 29% for the president and another 9%. (Priyashantha 2014). On 21st December, 2014 between approximately 2 p.m. and 3 p.m., Dedduwage did 50 informal face-to-face interviews between Maharagama and Dehiwala, an area which is traditionally understood as pro-Rajapaksa. The results were the following:

---

[16] In Facebook terms, post reach indicates the number of views to all the posts of a particular Facebook page.
[17] This post does not explicitly state that this amount of post reach occurred during the presidential election.

Vote for Mahinda – 14 (reasons are below)
- No Chandrika [Kumaratunga]/Ranil [Wickramasinghe][18] (5)
- Construction of roads and parks (5)
- Won the war/saved the country (3)
- No reason (1)

Vote for Maithri – 21 (reasons are below)
- No law in the country (6)
- The weight of loans is high/sold the country to China (6)
- Waste, corruption, fraud, nepotism (3)
- Buddhists were discriminated (3)
- Hard to live (1)
- The country is going in the wrong direction (1)
- Have to show gratitude[19] (1)

People who refused to give their opinion – (15)
Important- [Rajapaksa will win by] tricks/ fraud/ violence [-] (10) (Dedduwage 2014c).

Certainly the reliability of these surveys and polls is arguable. However, one cannot ignore the commitment of individual users to search the broader online community they are engaged with for consensus on topics that to them are of critical importance. As described above, the mainstream media had lost their capacity to critique President Rajapaksa. Therefore, even though one sensed through one's daily interactions and observations that the momentum of the election was with Sirisena, one did not see that momentum reflected in the mainstream media. Therefore, people were sharing their individual observations and perceptions on the political condition at the grassroots level by posting these informal surveys and interviews on Facebook.

## Conclusion

How did butterflies take down giants? Or in more academic terms, how did people with little power effectively unseat one of the most oppressive regimes post-colonial Sri Lanka had ever witnessed? In this context, the article is organized in order to understand how people used social media as a platform to discuss, debate and express their opinions about the present they were living. Through these discussions, debates and expressions, on social media the Rajapaksa regime was commonly understood as dystopic. As I argued, people used the realisation of their living in a dystopia to escape from that present by transforming the Facebook platform from a private space initially used to connect

---

[18]Chandrika Kumaratunga was the president before Mahinda Rajapaksa. Though they belong to the same political party, they had an intense political relationship due to their social status. Ranil Wickramasinghe had been the opposition leader as well as the leader of the main opposition party for nearly two decades.
[19] This was politically a sarcastic reason. Vote for Rajapaksa 'to show your gratitude' was a popular slogan in Rajapaksa campaign. In this regard, this person was going to show 'his gratitude' to Rajapaksa by voting for Sirisena.

with friends, into a political space. Using it as such, they discussed, debated and expressed their opinions in an effort to change the Rajapaksa regime, the main cause for their dystopian present. On the other hand, when the president called the election, Facebook became a place to convince people to vote for the common candidate. During this whole period, the anti-Rajapaksa discourse used dystopia as a concept to encourage people to overcome their oppressive present. Finally, in the morning of 9th January, 2015, people realised their efforts had not been wasted after seeing a Facebook video of Rajapaksa fleeing from the presidential residence back to his home town.

Since the general opinion across the political spectrum is of that regime transformation is necessarily a change in elites, this research describes how people who were less concerned about the political elites, acted together with other Facebook users, regardless of social status, to effectively change their present. For instance, anti-Rajapaksa discourse was strengthened by people from all walks of life. Since Facebook is accessible and used by the public, users, regardless of their social status, engaged in lively debates and discussions, thus becoming a platform to share information of the Rajapaksa regime and discuss various political topics. Most importantly, these Facebook activities occurred without the interference of the regime, and were not controlled by any type of governmental or private group. Therefore, in general, the individuality (of different opinions) had become important on Facebook. These factors had led to the emergence of a large group of individuals independent from the influence of mainstream politics. As I have illustrated, in this regime transformation, the influence of this group was significant. Even the officials of the Rajapaksa campaign as well as the Sirisena campaign concurred this factor.

As analysed in the research, people were not necessarily Sirisena followers. They were conscious of the untrustworthy nature of Sri Lankan politics. Therefore, rather than following an individual, they supported a set of ideals such as good governance, democracy and the rule of law. Hence, unlike previous ones, this presidential election was not understood as a struggle between two candidates, but rather as a struggle between a dystopian present (represented by the Rajapaksa regime) and political principles (represented by the common candidate).

All these factors contradict the understanding of regime transformation as reshuffling among elites. As pointed out, politics on Facebook, which was unregulated, and thus independent from the kind of influence the elites had over traditional media outlets, played a key role in this regime change. Thus, this is a story of 'butterflies who took down giants'. On January 11th, 2015, three days after the election, after overcoming the initial shock of defeating the mighty Rajapaksa regime, one 'butterfly', under the title 'it happened', shared a picture of a quotation which is believed to be from Mao Zedong: 'A dictator can implement laws to crush all the roses. But [he] cannot keep the spring from coming' (Dilanka 2015).

## Acknowledgements

This is the condensed version of my MA thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, Central European University, Budapest. This research would have not been possible without the help of a number of individuals including Prof. András Bozóki, my supervisor and Dr. Eszter Timár, my academic writing supervisor, for the guidance and encouragement. Also, I thank Dr. Janaki Jayawardana, University of Colombo and the anonymous reviewer for commenting on the manuscript and two copy editors for correcting the language.

## Appendices

President Rajapaksa meeting his supporters during a tour in Italy.



(Source: http://www.gossip-lanka.com/2012/10/president-mahinda-rajapaksa-tattoo_23.html.
Reproduced with permission)

## REFERENCES

Aalokaya. (2014), 'Don't Video Gota and Get Into Trouble.' Facebook. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=658364960901491.

Ape Media Social Media. (2014), 'Why Didn't You Hit Cameroon When He Was Here...Sujiwa Asks from Sachin Vass.' Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=1716893595202541.

Annon, Fawaz. (2014), 'LankaFocusNews.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/LankaFocusNews/videos/752526121483010/.

Bandara, Ruwan. (2014), 'NoAddress.' *Facebook*.Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/noaddress.lk/photos/a.19421704077800 9.1073741827.1942 05680779145/301747336691645/?type=3&theater.

Bennett, W. Lance. (2012), 'Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation.' *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 644 (November): 20–39.

Brecht, Bertolt (2011), 'The Buddha's Parable of the Burning House.' *Http://johnshaplin.blogspot.hu/*. Accessed December 8, 2015. http://johnshaplin.blogspot.hu/2011/12/poems-by-bertolt-brecht.html.

Chaminda, Sumith (2015), Accessed December 4, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/sumith.chaaminda/posts/10156078331675012.

Chaturanga, Ashan. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/827388813988045/.

Dedduwage, Chameera Jeewantha. (2014a), *Facebook*.Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/cjdrox/posts/10152831726878190.

Dedduwage, Chameera Jeewantha. (2014b), *Facebook*.Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/cjdrox/posts/10152825181763190.

Dedduwage, Chameera Jeewantha. (2014c), *Facebook*.Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/cjdrox/posts/10152847720243190.

Department of Elections. (n.d), 'Presidential Election – 17.11.2005.' Accessed December 9, 2015. http://www.slelections.gov.lk/pdf/2005%20Presidantial-Summary.pdf.

Dhananjaya, Shevone. (2014), 'LankaFocusNews.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/LankaFocusNews/videos/752526121483010/.

Dikkumbura, Gangul. (2014), 'UPFA - A Brighter Future.' *Facebook*.Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/slupfa/videos/10152874442931259/.

Dilanka, Samin. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=987139421314138&set=a.36789418990533 4.98442.100000542679192&type=3&theate.

Dissanayake, Daya. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/827388813988045/.

Favaz, Mohamed. (2014), 'LankaFocusNews.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/LankaFocusNews/videos/752526121483010/.

Freedom House. (2014), 'Freedom of the Press.' Accessed December 8, 2015.https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/sri-lanka.

Gordin, Michael D, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash. (2010), 'Introduction.' In *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, edited by Michael D Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, 1–17. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Guruge, Somaweera Talpe. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/827388813988045/.

Internet World Stats. (2015), 'Internet Usage in Asia.' *Internet World Stats*. Accessed April 25, 2016. http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm.

Jayasinghe, Ajith Parakum. (2015), 'පුංචි සමනල පැටවු මහායෝධයන්බිම හෙළූ ජනාධිපතිවරණ ප්‍රචාරණ සටන (Presidential Election Advertising Battle Where Giants Were Brought Down By Small Butterflies).' *w3lanka*. Accessed April 25, 2016. http://www.w3lanka.com/2015/01/blog-post_3.html.

Jayasooriya, Kapila R. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Jumly, Sheriff Mohamed. (2014), 'LankaFocusNews.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/LankaFocusNews/videos/752526121483010/.

Kalansooriya, Ranga. (2015), 'Polls & Social Media During The Jan 8th Electioneering Process.' *Colombo Telegraph*. Accessed May 18, 2016. https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/polls-social-media-during-the-jan-8th-electioneering-process/.

Kasthurirathna, Dharshana. (2016), *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/dkasthurirathna/posts/10153554027967895.

Keerthisinghe, Sanath. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Koswatta, Jagath. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Kumarawardana, Sagara. (2014), 'UPFA - A Brighter Future.' Facebook, Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/slupfa/videos/10152874442931259/.

LankaFocusNews. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed December 8, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/LankaFocusNews/videos/752526121483010/.

Malaka, Nuwan. (2014), *Facebook*.Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/cjdrox/posts/10152857883273190.

Marikkar, Faleel. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Narendrasinghe, Weeraparakrama. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/groups/thulawa/permalink/910192109004820/.

Nawshad, Nabeel. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Nelu, Ruwan. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/ruwan.nelu/posts/676538739127921.

Newsfirst.lk. (2014a), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Newsfirst.lk. (2014b), *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/827388813988045/.

NoAddress. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/noaddress.lk/photos/a.194217040778009.1073741827.194205680779145/301747336691645/?type=3&theater.

Pathirana, Kasun Chandranath. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016 https://www.facebook.com/kasunbuwa/posts/10152614196205805.

Pathirana, Mahinda. (2015), 'Janawari 08 ModayageKerellakda? (Is January 08 the Fool's Rebellion?).' *Yuthukama*. Accessed December 4, 2015.http://www.yuthukama.com/2015/12/Jan8ModayageKerella.html.

Podi Man. 2011. 'Samanalaya, Napunsakaya, Poya.' *Podi Man*. Accessed June 20, 2017. http://mamaiarui.blogspot.com/2011/12/blog-post_20.html.

Pradeep, Gayanath. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Premarathna, Dhanushka. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/groups/thulawa/permalink/910192109004820/.

Priyashantha, Nihal. (2014), *Facebook*.Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/cjdrox/posts/10152825181763190

Ranathunga, Tharindu. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/827388813988045/.

Ranciere, Jacques. (1991), *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ranciere, Jacques. (1992), 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization.' *October* 61, no. The Identity in Question (Summer) (n.d.): 58–64.

Ranciere, Jacques. (2010), 'Ten Thesis on Politics', *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Continuum: London. 27-44.

Rajapaksa, Mahinda. (2014), *Twitter*. Accessed June 20, 2017. https://twitter.com/presrajapaksa/status/453791224059543553.

Rupasingha, Akila. (2014), 'We Are Ready.' *Facebook*. Accessed June 05, 2016. https://www.facebook.com/apisudanam/videos/310839769114612/.

Sachindra, Lisitha Gayan. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Samantha, Jagath. (2014), 'LankaFocusNews.' *Facebook*. Accessed May 18, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/LankaFocusNews/videos/752526121483010/.

Samarasinghe, Sameera. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/ruwan.nelu/posts/676538739127921.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. (1994), 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited.' *Utopian Studies* 5 (1): 1–37. Accessed May 18, 2016. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20719246

Shirky, Clay. (2011), 'The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change.' *Foreign Affairs* 90 (1JANUARY/FEBRUARY): 28–41, Accessed December 8, 2015.http://www.jstor.org/stable/25800379.

Siripala, Nimal. (2015), 'The Facebook Miracles and Good Governance Has Shattered.' *Hirufm*. Accessed April 25, 2016. http://gossip.hirufm.lk/english/850/2015/11/facebook-miracles-good-governance-has-shattered-nimal-siripala.html.

Sumithraarachchi, Rohan. (2014), 'Newsfirst.lk.' *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016. https://www.facebook.com/newsfirst.english/videos/808855942507999/.

Taylor, Chris. (2011), 'Why Not Call It a Facebook Revolution?' *CNN*. Accessed June 20, 2017. http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/social.media/02/24/facebook.revolution/index.html.

Thilakawardana, Ravisha. (2014), *Facebook*. Accessed April 25, 2016 https://www.facebook.com/ravisha.thilakawardana/posts/10205263370527232.

UPFA - A Brighter Future. (2014a), *Facebook*. Accessed December 8, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/slupfa/videos/10152874442931259/.

UPFA - A Brighter Future. (2014b), *Facebook*. Accessed December 8, 2015.
https://www.facebook.com/slupfa/videos/10152875036021259/.

UPFA-A Brighter Future. (2014c), 'Army and Police Brothers, Do You Remember This Day?'
*Facebook*.Accessed April 25,
2016.https://www.facebook.com/slupfa/videos/10152842766821259/.

UPFA - A Brighter Future. (2015), Accessed April 25, 2016.
https://www.facebook.com/slupfa/posts/10153652129306259:0

Vanarkadie, Buddhika Sandaruwan. (2014), 'UPFA - A Brighter Future.' *Facebook*.Accessed April
25, 2016.https://www.facebook.com/slupfa/videos/10152874442931259/.

Vieira, Fátima. (2010), 'The Concept of Utopia.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian
Literature*, edited by Gregory Claeys, 3–27. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

We Are Ready. (2014a), *Facebook*. Accessed December 8,
2015.https://www.facebook.com/apisudanam/videos/310839769114612/.

Wellman, Barry. (2001), 'Physical Space and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking.'
*International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25.2 (June): 227–52. Accessed April 25,
2016. http://www.itu.dk/people/khhp/speciale/videnskabelige%20artikler/Wellman_2001%20-
%20%20personalized%20networking.pdf

Wijewardena, W.A (2015), 'The Great November Revolution: The inside Story according to Dinesh
Weerakkody.' *Daily FT*. Accessed December 7, 2015. http://www.ft.lk/article/504649/The-
Great-November-Revolution--The-inside-story-according-to-Dinesh-Weerakkody.

Young Generation Sri Lanka (2014), 'AYE AYE NOMA IWASAN // Maithripala Sirisena // YOUNG
GENERATION.'*Https://www.youtube.com*. Accessed December 8, 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmJkcBp1toU.