

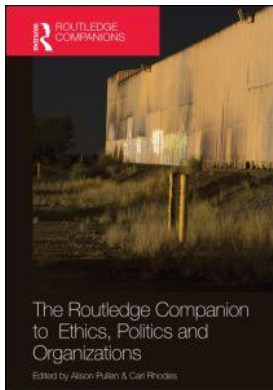
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On the burden of being-qua-non-being

In-between the lines of (working-class) writings

Dhammika Jayawardena

Introduction

It was a sunny morning in May in a small village 30 kilometres off Colombo, Sri Lanka. I was in the human resource manager's office of an apparel company, a congested partitioned room without a door. The left-side wall of the room was covered by a large poster of a few smiling factory women—'the employees of the year'. A thoughtful man in his early thirties, the human resource manager, was in his comfortable office chair. He was a graduate of human resource management and was supposed to be a participant of the fieldwork of my doctoral project. I began my dialogue with the manager, a semi-structured interview conducted in Sinhala. The interview was aimed at understanding managing factory women, if not (female) shopfloor labour in the company and Sri Lanka's apparel industry. The manager narrated:

There is a policy in our company to treat everyone equally. Even if our *director*¹ comes, there is only one *canteen* to eat. Even *lamai* [little ones] eat there. We don't have separate transport [for workers]. We have the same buses [for everyone]. Employees come in those buses. And *lamai* also come in those buses. That is a value that ChillCo [pseudonym] appreciates.

For the manager, ChillCo treats everyone equally, the *lamai*, the employees and the director—who exist in the company and whose existence is vital for the existence of the company. Nevertheless, the manager hardly tells us who these *lamai* are, who are different to the 'director' and the 'employees' in the company, where everyone is treated 'equally'. Indeed the reader of this chapter might wonder who 'these *other* beings' in this company called *lamai* are, in fact *lamai*, the little ones? And so how does their existence exist in the factory milieu in the Global South if adults become *lamai*, so to speak—ethics?

Owing to these ethico-political questions and inspired largely by the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, in this chapter I seek to share the burden of being-qua-non-being of factory women in this part of the world, the Global South. For this, I revisit factory women's daily struggle for *existence* in Sri Lanka's apparel industry. Simultaneously I read in-between un-doing

factory women's collective identity as *lamai* as it is embodied in the multiple (working-class) writings in the industry and wider Sri Lankan society. I argue that the question of the Other and so (doing) ethics in the apparel factory milieu of the Global South is a largely neglected phenomenon in literature. Nevertheless, I welcome the scholars' tireless enthusiasm for ethics and their commitment towards (the question of) the Other (Jones, 2003; Jones et al., 2005; Rhodes and Westwood, 2007; Rhodes, 2009; Pullen and Rhodes, 2010; McMurray et al., 2011; Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013). And I commend their contribution to understanding the daily struggle of factory women in the Global South (Lynch, 2002, 2007; Hewamanne, 2008; Perera, 2008). Yet, I wonder whether we are overexcited about 'Ethics' while sidelining the factory women's daily struggle 'for (being) existence' in this part of the world, the Global South. Indeed what does this elusive, albeit vital, interconnection between the existence—of factory women – and (doing) ethics in this localized global apparel industry in Sri Lanka mean for us?

Thus, in this chapter first I explain how unemployed-rural-young-women in Sri Lanka were compelled to be wage labourers in the (re)emerged apparel industry in the nascent liberal economy in the late 1970s. Then, I move on to see how the newly formed *productive* labour of migrant young women was positioned in the industry as part and parcel of women's deprived economic and rural family background. Simultaneously, I examine the ways in which young women's identity was done and gradually established as a flock of 'childrenized' female shopfloor labour, *lamai* (little ones), in the industry. Indeed, taking factory women's struggle for existence in the industry—the desire 'to be'—not as a narcissistic moment, I show how this desire has *materialized* by itself as the fundamental struggle of factory women 'for (being) existence' as Subject in the factory milieu in the Global South. Therefore, along with constitutes of adults–little ones (*lamai*) in Sri Lankan society, I read in-between un-doing factory women's collective identity as *lamai* as it is embodied in the multiple (working-class) writings—a few oral texts, a poem, a teledrama and a film. In so doing, I dissect the double-bind nature of factory women's struggle for (being) existence—how this struggle, on the one hand, marks factory women's resistance for their non-existence as *lamai* whereas marking their very existence as *lamai* on this localized global factory floor, on the other.

In this background, I show how the double-bind nature of the factory women's struggle with or resistance for un-doing their collective identity as *lamai* creates an 'indissoluble' ethical paradox within which adult factory women become *lamai*, the little ones. Yet, I argue that the resistance of factory women—in the desire 'to be (seen or recognized)'—is the moment in which we confront the face of the Other and so ethics, perhaps in rather violent ways, as opposed to objectifying the Other—the process of the childrenization of female shopfloor labour in the localized global apparel industry of Sri Lanka (Jayawardena, 2014).

Waves of neoliberalism and articulating factory women's collective identity

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Global South as well as the Global North was subject to the waves of the neoliberalism which blew across the world (Harvey, 2005). The largely state-controlled stagnating economy of the island nation of Sri Lanka had no way of escaping from this economic reality. Indeed, in the late 1970s the rightist United National Party (UNP) government, as opposed to the glorified state-controlled welfare economy since the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948, liberalized the country's economy (Wignaraja, 1998). The liberalization created new job opportunities for 'traditionally' unemployed women either as housemaids in the oil-rich West Asia or as shopfloor workers in the apparel industry in newly established Katunayake Free Trade Zone (FTZ). Interestingly, in this context women from middle- and low-income

families in urban and semi-urban areas, who were subject to economic hardship in the nascent liberal economy, were eager to find jobs as housemaids in West Asia. However, the majority of rural young women, who were under parental control, yet in a deprived economic situation, were absorbed by the labour-intensive factory process of the apparel industry. This absorber, as history tells us, subsequently, led to a heavy influx of rural young women to the FTZ (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 1999; Jayaweera, 2002).

The arrival of rural young women to the industry as shopfloor workers in the late 1970s was unheeded or not welcomed by actors in many strata of Sri Lankan society, including both the traditional and new left, trade unions, journalists, social critics and residents in the surrounding areas of the FTZ. Indeed, the left and the trade unions particularly were reluctant to accept migrant women as their ‘comrades’ and ‘companions’ (Jayaweera, 2002; Lynch, 2002). Women’s affiliation with the global factory floor was the main target of the left and the traditional trade unions that were ardent critics of the liberal economic policy of the UNP government. As such, the work the migrant women did in the industry was often branded as ‘useless’ or ‘dirty’ work. In some instances it was described with the phrase *suddiyanta jangi mahanawa* (sewing underwear for white women), which denotes both sexual and dirty (Lynch, 2002; Jayawardena, 2010). On the other hand, apart from these criticisms the migrant women were subject to many opposing socio-organizational forces and processes, such as poor lodging, sanitary, transport and healthcare facilities; unattainable production targets and physical punishments at work; and verbal abuses, sexual harassment and attacks at work as well as in the wider social milieu (Devanarayana, 1997; Samanmali, 2007).

In this context, the women’s status – of being young (generally in the age group between 17 and 25), from economically deprived rural family backgrounds, unskilled and mostly schooled up to grade 10 and so ‘uneducated’ – had denied them any chance to rise up either as shopfloor employees or as proletarian women in the Global South (De Silva, 2002; Jayaweera, 2002). Instead in the factory milieu these young women were branded as easy-going non-bargaining type ‘workers’, who were typically the dowry-seekers for their marriage. In wider society they were portrayed as ignorant, poor womenfolk who would indulge in sex since they were not under parental control (Lynch, 2002; Hewamanne, 2003). In fact, a newspaper article recounts for example:

young *working girls* are seen dancing around intoxicated with liquor [in musical shows²], their boyfriends usually providing intoxicants. Many *girls* [*ganu lamai*] indulge in sex not only inside the enclosed area but also even along by ways.

....

The change of behaviour of *girls* [from the villages] takes 3–6 months after they come to the zone. The reason for the change appears to be the gradual disappearance of the *bond between parents and children*. During the probationary period workers get hardly any opportunity to visit their parents [in the villages].

...

Often the *working girls* are jeered at as “*juki keli*” [*Juki* pieces] in buses and public places [in the surrounding environs of the zone].

The *girls* themselves have realized the lowly position they are accorded in the wider society.

(*Sunday Island*, 1991, 15 December, pp. 1 and 3; my emphasis)

In this context factory women’s collective identity was done and established as *garment lamai*, *juki lamai*, *juki keli* (*juki* pieces) and *juki badu*³ (*juki* commodities), if not *lamai* as a whole, by

the actors in both wider Sri Lankan society and the industry (Devanarayana, 1997; Lynch, 2007; Hewamanne, 2008). This was despite the significant role that they played as shopfloor employees in the apparel industry—the second largest export generator of the nascent liberal economy (Kelegama, 2005). Thus, these derogatory nicknames, specifically *juki lamai*, *juki keli* (juki pieces) and *juki badu* (juki commodities), on the one hand, tell the way in which factory women were ‘plugged into’ electronic sewing machines called ‘Juki’ (a popular Japanese brand), in the nascent liberal economic context. On the other hand, they tell us how the migrant women’s (non-)existence in the industry has been dehumanized and objectified under the name of *lamai* since their arrival in the industry, although the term *lamai* generally signifies children or little ones in Sri Lankan society (Jayawardena, 2014).

Thus, the act or the process of un-doing workers’ collective identity as *lamai* has emerged as a rather violent process in its first appearance in the industry. However, the process (dis)appears in multiple forms, including its (apparently) innocent possibilities. And it is embedded and embodied in a variety of different oral and written texts, such as everyday utterance, political debates, job advertisements, poems, free verse, newspaper reportage, films and soap operas woven by the actors in the industry and wider society (Lynch, 2007; Perera, 2008; Jayawardena, 2010). Thus, the process of un-doing the *lamai* identity, within which adult factory women become *lamai*, little ones—flock of ‘childrenized’ female *shopfloor* workers—is a peculiar one since its emergence in the apparel industry.

The childrenization

Despite the violent nature of (un)doing factory women’s collective identity as *lamai* the utterance of the term *lamai* to refer to and represent boys and girls as well as young men and women in Sri Lankan society is neither a derogatory nor an uncommon utterance. For example, in the family milieu daughters and sons are called *lamai* by parents and other adult members of the family. In educational institutes—primary, secondary and higher—students are often called *lamai*. In wider society young men and boys become *pirimi lamai* whereas young women and girls are called *ganu lamai*. Indeed, they are all together *lamai*. So the term *lamai* is not an ‘inherently pejorative’ signifier in Sri Lankan society. Therefore, the reader of this chapter may wonder what’s wrong with factory women’s (non)existence as *lamai* in the apparel industry since they are already (*gode*) *ganu lamai* (Jayawardena, 2014).⁴ And so the identity of (*gode*) *ganu lamai* is the one young women have probably brought into the industry, and which has probably been constructed chiefly upon their ‘gendered body’. At the same time, the reader confronts an inevitable ethico-political question: why other women in the apparel industry as well as members of other ‘feminine jobs’ in Sri Lanka, for example nursing, teaching and even field labourers in the plantation estates, have not become *lamai*, little ones, if ‘gendered body’ or ‘gender’ is the sole reason for factory women in the industry becoming *lamai*. In fact, even when the human resource manager of ChillCo narrates the ‘equal employee policy’ of the company, for him, other than *lamai* there are director and employees of the company. Does the manager tell us that there are some ‘women employees’ in the company who are certainly not *lamai*?

The act or process of un-doing factory women’s collective identity as *lamai* keeps the identity in a quandary which (dis)appears in the multiple (working-class) writings woven by the actors in both the industry and wider society. For example, the soap opera, entitled *Grahanaya*, which narrates the tragic love affair of a factory woman in the FTZ, Trilishiya, recounts to us the quandary of (doing) the *lamai* identity even at the very beginning of its first episode—how the factory woman becomes *lamaya* (a little one) whereas her floor manager, a middle-aged middle-class woman, remains ‘Madam’ during the first encounter between the duo:

- Manager:* *Lamaya*, what did you say as your hometown?⁵
Trilishiya: Wennapuwa,⁶ *Madam*.
Manager: Who are in your family?
Trilishiya: Two younger brothers, younger sister, mother, [and] father.
Manager: What does your father do?
Trilishiya: A fisherman.
Manager: So there may be lots of economic hardship in [your] home.
Trilishiya: Yes *Madam*.

In this factory context in the FTZ the utterance of the term *lamai* to refer to and represent female shopfloor workers, as the soap opera narrates, does not tell us that the identity of the young woman is done solely upon her ‘gendered body’—being *ganu lamai*. Nor does it necessarily embody the term’s ‘innocent’ meanings in the family milieu and wider Sri Lankan society. Likewise, it doesn’t signify the concept—the signified—of wage female labour as such which existed in Sri Lankan society—in the forms of teaching, nursing and field labour in the plantation estates for example – before young women’s arrival in the industry (Jayawardena, 1971). Instead the ‘gender-ed body’ of the factory woman, Trilishiya, I argue, is, *inter alia*, part of the axes of power relations that constitutes the *lamai* identity. Therefore, *her* body is not the sole determinant of the identity and so her (non-)existence as *lamaya* (a little one) in the factory milieu in the Global South. Indeed, despite the ‘given’ gendered body of the duo the woman *manager* becomes *Madam* whereas the *factory* woman’s (non-)existence is marked and established as *lamaya*, a little one. Is this due to the class affiliation of the two women, the manager and the shopfloor worker, as narrated and marked in *Grahanaya* as well as in many other (working-)class writings, vividly in cinematic texts like *Sulang Kirilli* (The Wind Bird)? Similar to *Grahanaya*, *Sulang Kirilli*, narrates the life and struggle of a factory woman, named Rathnawali, in the FTZ, who was pregnant by her lover, a married army soldier.

- Manager:* Where’s Rathnawali today? Hasn’t she come to work?
Vijitha: Yes *Madam*, she hasn’t come to work.
Manager: She hasn’t informed us that she would not come today. Went half-day yesterday also. Vijitha, do you know anything about why she has not come today?
Vijitha: No *Madam*. Even last evening I spoke with her but.
Manager: I don’t know why these *lamai* don’t come to work even during the *probation period*.

As in *Grahanaya*, on the factory floor, as narrated in *Sulang Kirilli*, factory women become *lamai* whereas their woman manager emerges as *Madam* despite their ‘given’ gender. Therefore, factory women and their (productive) labour, which we confront in the everyday work milieu of the industry, can never be absolutely fitted into the abstract concept of ‘female wage labour’, or even into the widely used ‘official’ job titles, such as sewing machine operators, quality checkers or helpers. On the contrary, the signifier *lamai*, as I argue in this chapter, is the signification of female wage labour, which has been *childrenized* since the migrant women’s (unwelcome) arrival in the industry. As a result, the concept of female wage labour—i.e. the signified—in the context of this localized global apparel industry has formed a ‘new’ sign, the *childrenized* female labour, out of fusion with the signifier *lamai* (Walkerdine, 1989; Barthes, 2000). And the sign *childrenized* female labour is in fact not something else, yet, as Barthes (2000) tells us, the associative total of the signifier *lamai* and the signified female wage labour which existed before uniting and

forming this third object: the sign. The sign, childrenized female labour indeed intersects and connects with the multiple meanings embodied in '*lamai*' (children) and '(female) wage labour' in the Sri Lankan society, if not in Sinhala linguistic community (Jayawardena, 2010). During this process the signifier *lamai* emerges as the signifier par excellence of the collective identity of migrant factory women, whose (productive) labour has been *childrenized*. Consequently, the signifier *lamai* and hence un-doing factory women's collective identity as *lamai* not only depicts and marks women's very non-existence in the industry as *lamai*—being-qua-non-being. It also signifies how the gender (identity) of the migrant factory women (*gode ganu lamai*, and their class, *shopfloor* labour (identity), intersect in the process of childrenization in the FTZ in the context of the nascent liberal economy. Thus, 'the childrenization' always poses the unanswered question of why the migrant women's presence on the localized global factory floor in the apparel industry was/is subject to an objectification—under the name of *lamai*—probably the vital question of the relationship between the existence and ethics.

In the face of the other

The presence of a factory woman in front of *me* on this localized global factory floor in Sri Lanka's apparel industry is itself *her* non-presence. She (dis)appears in front of me as sheer object or replica of her collective identity, *lamai*. Thus, it is a replica of her objectified (productive) labour, its very non-existence in the industry as *lamai*, which is childrenized in history (and at present). Her appearance is indeed her *disappearance*, her being-qua-non-being. Yet, I, as well as many others, do not bother about her 'being'—qua-non-being—on the factory floor of the Global South, because 'it', her estranged labour, is there: it has been existing on the factory floor since the (re)emergence of the industry in the nascent liberal economic context.

But at the same time I have fear for this non-presence, her being-qua-non-being. It haunts me as she continuously struggles 'for (being) existence' as Subject (Devanarayana, 1997; Perera, 2008). Therefore, I have to respond to her 'right to be' on this localized global factory floor. This is not because, as Levinas (1989: 82) tells us, of some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of my fear for her presence; the face of the Other. So, Levinas suggests, my primary encounter with her, "being face to face with the other, is the 'original ethical relations'" (Pullen and Rhodes, 2010: 239). As such She, "[t]he Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility" (Levinas, 1989: 83), the ethical responsibility which I did not want to take.

Thus, the otherness of the Other in this localized global industry did not bother me. I let migrant young women's presence in the industry undergo the violent socio-organizational forces and processes prevailing particularly in the nascent liberal economic context. I was not troubled by these forces and processes through which workers' so-called productive labour was (and is) childrenized as part and parcel of un-doing their collective identity as *lamai*. Therefore, I, as well as many others, did not hear, "[her] appeal to my ancient responsibility, as if . . . [she] were unique in the world—beloved" (Levinas, 2007: 197). Thus, even when worker-feminist activists in the FTZ, who are keen to *undo* the very non-existence of workers as *lamai* (see Jayawardena, 2010), when encountering the (non-)presence of *her* face, the face of the Other, their unconditional commitment to recognize Other as Other (Jones, 2003) remains problematic. In fact a young activist in the zone, Nilupa, who is an ex-factory worker, articulates the same during the fieldwork of my doctoral project for example, when I asked her about 'her beings' as a factory worker in the industry:

Nilupa: [The company] trained [and then] put me onto a [production] *line*. [Managers told me] you stay three months. After three months you will be definitely made to stand up⁷ [*nagittanawa*] from here [production line].

Dhammika: They call as standing up.

Nilupa: On the *line* they call like that.

Dhammika: Why [do they] call like that?

Nilupa: That's the way *lamai use it*. But [it means] being promoted. That's the way the *workers use it*. We are stood up [*nagittanawa*].

Nilupa's usage of the term *lamai* or her act of (un)doing the workers' collective identity as *lamai*, which is hurriedly replaced and effaced by (the term) 'workers', recalls the violent process of *childrenization*, her beings in that process. Indeed in the latter part of my interview Nilupa accepted that uttering the term *lamai* to refer to and represent factory women—doing the *lamai* identity—is 'a normal thing' in the industry. Therefore, as well as many others', Nilupa's 'understanding' of migrant young women as 'workers' does not invoke them, but only names them. So, as similarly in other encounters, here as well factory women's 'desire to be (seen and recognized)' as Subject is denied, yet subtly. Therefore, as Levinas (2007: 8) tells us "with regard to beings, [this] understanding carries out an act of violence and of negation. A partial negation, which is violence." As such this understanding does not challenge the childrenization process whereby the workers—their so-called productive labour—are dehumanized and objectified under the name of *lamai*—*juki lamai*, *juki keli* and so forth. Nor does it put the Self into question, which is the path to acquire unique solidarity with Others, as Levinas (1998) suggests. On the contrary, it gradually obliterates and denies the possibility of an unconditional encounter with her—the face of the Other, ethics (Levinas, 2007)—by using whatever way that is possible (see, for example, *Sunday Island*, 1991; Lynch, 2002). In fact, as, for example, a middle-class woman anthropologist narrates factory women's identity or their resistance—as (being) 'quasi prostitutes':

Incidentally, many FTZ workers [factory women] liked to match black skirts with bright yellow or bright pink blouses, even though *middle-class people* [in Sri Lanka] associated such color combinations with *prostitutes*.

(Hewamanne, 2003: 77; my emphasis)

Yet, this same denial, despite the middle-class men and women's fantasy of workers' beings and their struggles for existence, is the passage through which 'the *lamai*' have been struggling for life – the desire to be seen and recognized as Subject—since their arrival in the industry (Perera, 1994; Perera, 2008; *Vinischaya Karanu Mana*, 1999).

The existence and resistance

Thus, migrant factory women's struggle 'for (being) existence' as Subject on the factory floor of the Global South is itself the resistance for their non-existence as *lamai*, although we either distort or hardly take 'this resistance' into academic consideration, except in a very few cases (see Perera, 2008). Nevertheless the resistance is *material*, but more often remains subtle. And the resistance is thus embodied in factory women's (working-class) writings (Perera, 1994; Perera, 2008; *Vinischaya Karanu Mana*, 1999), as, for example, in the poem titled *Juki Lokaya* (Juki world):

Sixty, seventy per hour, the *target* of *Juki machine*
 My hands are in a big struggle, as [they] think [how to attain the target]
 Day's *O.T.* knows the reduction when cut one, two hours
 Cartwheel of the life is going to reverse

Until nine, ten o'clock, operating the *machine*, tiredly
 Don't cry *operator*, [you] have to work
 Though the *Boss* yells, wandering around time-to-time
 Does the sleeping dog in the factory wake up for [this] thundering sound [?]

A big mess in *Cutting* [section that] supplies work to [production] *line*
 So threads [of garment] are cut, forcing *lamai* in *Quality* [section]
 The Bosses' shouts, like a thunder happens closely
Polythene [of packing] chatters, mixing [this sound] to *packing*

Enters *garment* [industry], embracing poverty
 At the [factory] gate, *ganu lamai* [girls] are cramming
 Don't enter this world knowingly
 Go away from people who don't know human quality

To get salary, when cramming at office door
 Roars of *ties* and *coats* there are not lack
 Run by current [determination], like this long journey
 Think *Juki machine*, we too are human being in this world

The Boss takes the [attendance] *card*, if go home for four days
 So, creeping into the *office* with tears in eyes
 Getting it back not easy as going home [to village]
 So, you only have the four Gods' protection⁸

Gana Ranawaka, August 1988 (*Vinischaya Karanu Mana*, 1999: 25)

Factory women's 'desire to be (seen and recognized)', *Juki Lokaya* recounts, is a mode of women's resistance to their very non-existence in the industry—the *Juki* world—as *lamai*, the being-qua-non-being. The poem thus narrates factory women's, (*ganu lamai*, struggle with the middle-class white-collar men in the industry; 'bosses' and 'ties and coats'. It explicates the agony of factory women's estranged labour on the factory floor of the Global South. It marks their class affiliation as proletarian women, and evokes their village roots and the identity, (*gode ganu lamai*. And above all the poem takes a risk and bravely recalls and re-establishes migrant women's (*juki lamai* identity via connecting the identity and the *juki* machine into which women's (productive) labour is 'plugged'. During this or as a result of it the (un-doing) *lamai* identity, which is itself the violent outcome of the childrenization of factory women's so-called productive labour, has emerged as a passage through which the narrator—factory woman—resists her very non-existence as *lamai*. Paradoxically here the poem gives 'life' to the *juki* machine—'think[ing] *Juki* machine'—an object, into which the migrant workers' so-called productive labour is plugged. Thus in this passage of 'resistance' or via it, the poem recounts to us how an object, the *Juki* machine, becomes Subject—the thinking machine or *lamai*. Subsequently, it narrates how the 'subjectified object' (or vice versa) resists the objectification of factory women, their very non-existence as *lamai* in the industry. Therefore, for being-qua-life, Levinas (2007: 173) tells us, "there is a self-contraction, a for-itself, an 'instinct of perseveration,' already struggling for life". Indeed, as *Juki Lokaya* suggests, (un-doing) factory women's collective identity as *lamai* is

a double-bind phenomenon in the process, although the identity appears as a fixed identity. It, on one hand, marks women's very non-existence in the industry as *lamai*. On the other hand, it is also the same identity which factory women—*lamai*—deploy to mark their resistance to and *undo* their very non-existence in the industry as *lamai*, the being-qua-non-being. Consequently, we can see the 'resistance' or the double-bind nature of (un-doing) the *lamai* identity even in the industrial relations encounters in the industry, such as in Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)⁹ meetings as well as in (working-class) writings. In fact, as I witnessed in ChillCo, factory women, who represent their colleagues at the company's JCC meetings, deploy the term *lamai* and so un-do the *lamai* identity at the meetings as part and parcel of their demand for 'decent life':

There is no space in the bus comes from . . . Other two buses do not allow [us to get on]. Recently *lamayek* [a little one or factory woman] nearly fell off [the bus]. [*Lamai* in] other two buses shout that *lamai* can't come standing in [the bus].

As the above case—where women demand better transport facilities – exemplifies, the double-bind nature of (un-doing) *lamai* identity, on the one hand, signifies factory women's non-existence in ChillCo as *lamai*: how the labour of migrant factory women was (and is) objectified in the company and the industry. At the same time, on the other hand, it marks their resistance to this objectification, the being-qua-non-being, within which an object becomes Subject. As such beings of factory woman on the factory floor of the Global South are the possibility of non-beings. And *her* non-presence is the possibility of her presence, the face of the Other, in front of me, which is elusive and in process and appeal for my ethical responsibility. Nevertheless, the becoming of her beings, the face of the Other, makes my ethical responsibility impossible, even in the context she resists to her non-existence: the being-qua-non-being.

The im-possibility of (doing) ethics

Thus, as *Grahanaya* narrates, for example, when Trilishiya, the migrant (factory) woman, resists her ex-manager, who helped the owner of Trilishiya's factory to rape her, we find the impossibility of ethics/the Other: recognizing Trilishiya's existence as Subject. Indeed despite Trilishiya's new status as a self-reliant single mother, who runs her own tailoring shop, the woman's resistance, as it is embodied in *Grahanaya*, is itself a space within which the otherness of the Other is lost.

Ex-manager: Now, [he is] *loku lamayek* [a big child]. Anyhow, a brain of a real businessman. Shortly, [he will] set up a factory that will have power over this entire village. You must try to be like your father. Okay?

[The manager is cooing over Trilishiya's child]

Trilishiya: [Angrily and loudly] Amara [Trilishiya's domestic helper] what are you doing here. Go and feed *lamayawa* [the child].

Ex-manager: How is the business, Trilishiya?

Trilishiya: I am just doing it!

Ex-manager: If you did the job only, you would never have been in this status [becoming the owner of the tailoring shop]. *Lamaya*, even a bank wouldn't give that much amount to *lamai* like you.

Trilishiya: Hmm [she is avoiding a response].

The utterance, if not doing Trilishiya's identity as *lamaya*—deferred presence of her *lamai* identity—by the manager, once she noticed her ex-factory worker's arrogant behaviour or resistance, creates an 'indissoluble' ethical paradox within which both Trilishiya's son, the 'real child', and Trilishiya, the mother of the 'real child', become *lamai*. So the elusive presence of Trilishiya, who is both present and absent at this moment of resistance, makes my ethical responsibility impossible even though she summons me and begs for my ethical responsibility. Her inability to discontinue her beings of factory woman in the industry and at the same time her (non-)presence in front of me, being-qua-non-being, makes my ethical responsibility towards her im-possible. Nevertheless, the im-possibility of her being—qua-non-being—does not indicate to me that I am not responsible for her being on this localized global factory floor. Rather, as Levinas (1985: 96; original emphasis) insists, "since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him [her], without even having taken on responsibilities in his [her] regard; his [her] responsibility is *incumbent on me*". Indeed her (non-)presence in front of me (re)calls for my ethical responsibility, which I did not want to take, but within which I can *exist*—as ethical Subject—the meaning of the ethical, as Levinas (1998: 32) puts it.

Conclusion

Thus, factory women's struggle for existence, the desire 'to be', in this localized global apparel industry is not a 'narcissistic moment' which middle-class men and women can play. Instead it is the desire, which has *materialized* by itself as the fundamental struggle of factory women, 'for (being) existence' as Subject in the factory milieu in the Global South. Nevertheless, factory women's struggle for (being) existence is a kind of aporia, which (dis)appears as part and parcel of (un-doing) factory women's collective identity as *lamai*; how their so-called productive labour is childrenized and subsequently objectified as *lamai* or under the name of *lamai*. So (un-doing) factory women's collective identity as *lamai* marks women's resistance for their non-existence—as *lamai*—whereas marking their very (non-)existence as *lamai*, the being-qua-non-being, in this localized global factory context. This double-bind nature of (un-)doing the *lamai* identity and so the women's resistance for their very non-existence as (being) *lamai* then creates an 'indissoluble' ethical paradox within which adult factory women become *lamai*, the little ones. Yet, the resistance of factory women—the desire 'to be (seen or recognized)'—despite its aporetic nature, is also the very moment in which we confront ethics, the face of the Other-ness, the possibility of dying for the Other, as Levinas (2007) suggests. As such, on the factory floor of the Global South, we confront the face of the Other perhaps in rather violent ways, as opposed to objectifying the Other: the process of childrenization of female shopfloor labour in this localized global apparel industry of Sri Lanka.

But this resistance—by factory women at which we confront the Other/ethics—does not permanently dissolve the impossibility of (doing) ethics. Nor does it even make my ethical responsibility impossible in the factory milieu in the Global South. Instead the presence of a factory woman in front of *me* on this localized global factory floor in Sri Lanka's apparel industry is itself *her* non-presence, the being-qua-non-being, which makes my ethical responsibility impossible. Therefore, as the conclusion of this chapter, I pose the question of (doing) ethics—of factory women in the Global South—in-between 'the desire to be (seen or recognized)' and the face of *this* Other-ness. Yet, I neither argue that the desire 'to be' is the fundamental question of (doing) ethics nor do I call to 'un-do' ethics vis-à-vis (un-)doing factory women's collective identity as *lamai* in this localized global factory context. Therefore, the way I share this burden of being—qua-non-being—of factory women in Sri Lanka's localized global apparel industry with the reader may remain unfinished, awaiting the next supplement of reading.

Notes

- 1 Except what I use italics to denote Sinhala, the italicized words are in English in the original Sinhala text. I continue this italicization throughout the chapter.
- 2 In the Katunayake FTZ, musical shows, organized by factories in the zone or other organizations, were common during this period. The social image of these events was, however, mostly negative. Many believed that the events tarnished the widely accepted cultural values and the (ideal Sinhala-Buddhist) womanhood in Sri Lanka.
- 3 In colloquial Sinhala *badu* (in singular *baduwa*) also denotes easy-going women or prostitutes. For example, *baduwak gahanwa*, literally 'hit a commodity', means sexual intercourse with an easy-going woman or prostitute.
- 4 The term 'gode' (rustic) signifies the immature and inexperienced nature of *ganu lamai* (girls) in the FTZ.
- 5 In Sinhala grammatical structures of spoken and written sentences are different. So disregarding the odd nature of the sentences when they appear in English, I offer a 'direct' translation to highlight the original grammatical structure of the sentences in spoken Sinhala. Thus, rather than translating this sentence as 'what is your hometown?' or 'where are you from?', for example, I translate the sentence as 'what did you say as your hometown?' It should be noted, however, that even this direct translation does not give a guarantee of the original temperament of the sentences in spoken Sinhala.
- 6 A coastal village in the North Western Province in Sri Lanka.
- 7 'Made to stand up' (*nagittanawa*) in the industry means promoting a factory worker/seamstress to a supervisory position. So the term connotes two meanings, namely promotion as well as standing up because unlike seamstresses supervisors work standing up.
- 8 In Sri Lanka people traditionally believe in the power of four Gods who are known as *satharawaram deviyo*. Here the narrator refers to the protection of the four Gods.
- 9 JCC is an alternative labour relations encounter proposed by the Greater Colombo Economic Commission Law No. 4 of 1978, the major statutory arm of attracting foreign investors to the FTZs since the economic liberalization. Here management and representatives of workers meet and discuss matters relating to labour relations. However, unlike in the unionized context, in this encounter the bargaining power of workers is restricted.

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