

Vivimarie VanderPoorten
Open University, Sri Lanka

April is the Cruellest Month

(For the victims of the Rambukkana shooting: People's Uprising, Sri Lanka, 2022)

In the jerky viral videos
you can see they haven't eaten in days.
The desperate diction.
The rhyming recklessness.
The poetry is in the pity.
The soldier-poet Owen once said
But this is a different kind of war.
Poems fall from the mouth
like rotting teeth.
There is no poetry in poverty.
In the shaky videos
the narration is about need
not about the inconvenience
of queues but
literal starving,
the need to stay alive.
The narration is punctuated by swear words
daily-wage earners' anger

and mother-fucker

and fuck you, Mr. President!

Politeness is a language

only the unhungry can afford

to speak.

The pampered people

watch the protests

from the safety of iPad screens;

they tighten their lips:

“how violent are the poor”!

Those of us

privileged people

drive to Galle Face

and park at Crescat Boulevard

and say look at how decently

we protest—

we wear our masks,

we sing and perform

in both national languages,

we don't burn tyres,

we don't set things on fire.

We read poetry.

But in the jerky video

of the protests of the impoverished—

far from the Megapolis

and the clever projected lights

and the technical expertise

and the hashtag generation

and makeshift libraries—

no one is handing out yoghurts

or cooked chickpeas

or cream crackers.

There, people are tired.

They are blocking roads,

they are inconvenient,

they are picking up stones.

The fire of hunger

is now a burning tyre.

They are calling

the president foul names,

they are saying

Die, you mad fucker!

We haven't eaten

in three days.

The poetry is in the hunger.