Impact of War Memorialisation Events in Post War Ethnic Reconciliation Process of Sri Lanka

Gunasekara, AMAS[1*] and Pannilage, U[2]

[1]Head, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna

[2]Professor, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna

Email: suranjith@soci.ruh.ac.lk

Abstract

Memorialization is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Historically, memorialization has been witnessed over the years in various forms. Erasing memories of specific communities took place in the post-independent political process as a result of ethnopolitics. However, the politics of memory and memorialization continue even to date in the post-war context. Erasing the memory of particular communities from the commemoration process in the post-war Sri Lankan social context is the core research theme of this study. The war memory represents the sensitive and emotional assets of both the victorious and the defeated parties of the war. The commemoration of the deceased is a value long being established by any community. The memory and the memorialization of war heroes have acquired a political significance under the norms of a nation-state and ethno-nationalist secessionist movements. This study examines the memorialization process, power relations and hegemonic formations that are part of the war memorialization in Sri Lanka and discusses social, political as well as psychological implications of the parties resorting to the conflict in their attempt to maintain war memories in the post-conflict context. The main objective of the study is to understand the nature of the war commemoration in post-war Sri Lanka by exploring the historical and political reasons. The study revealed that memorialization has amounted to hegemonic cultural Memory and the Memory and efforts of memorialization of "the other's memory are being erased".

Introduction

The war memorialization is a practice introduced in Europe in the late eighteenth century. The history of remembering the deceased in Sri Lanka is a long-established practiced (Mahawansa, 2007). However, the European practices of the war remembrance could be traced back to 1793 (Burke, 1989). There is the first monument related to memorialization in Frankfurt, Germany, in memorializing a soldier in the form of heroic expression (ibid). The history of the war memorialization in contemporary Sri Lanka through monuments emerged in the context of the civil war and its aftermath. However, the memorialization process is a common practice throughout the history in forms ranging from monuments and remembrance days to teaching history and forming of a school and educational curriculum. The exercises of memory can usefully be mobilized in the ethno nationalist mindset among the communities (Hass, 1998) as well as a great healer and an enabler of reconciliation, paving ways, and opportunities for dialogue, understanding, apologizing, acknowledging and addressing past violence between divided societies (Luhrmann, 2015). It is revealed that the memorialization could play the role of truth-seeking, justice, reparations and guaranteeing non-repetition. However, in the history, the memorialization has been manipulated to elevate the cultural memory of the hegemonic groups into a high position. As Evans (1997) pointed out, "the cultural memory is constructed. The erasure of the Memory of "the other" and the memorialization of 'the events of one's own is normal practice legitimized and justified through the hegemonic ideologies and the power formations throughout the history.

This research sheds lights on the memorialization of war events between the binaries of 'the winners' and 'the losers' who are in the North the East and the South of Sri Lanka as well.

The state always tried to link the memorialization of 'losers' to the identity politics in which the Memory of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelarm (LTTErs) in the North, which is labelled as a commemoration of terrorists (Colombo telegraph.org). This had been successful until the state decided to destroy *'Ahimsakayinge Aramaya* (a place where is respected by people as sacred place),' a monument to commemorate a group of youth who lived in the Southern were victimized by the government (the catamaran.org). The research problem of the study was to inquire whether the right of memorialization is kept in the hands of power.

Sri Lankan society experienced nearly a three-decade-long civil war until May 2009. The civil war had resulted in the loss of thousands of civilians and soldiers' lives and unimaginable hardships, and mental trauma is leading to the fragmentation of the social fabric of Sri Lanka and weakening the polity. It is not easy to evaluate the impact of the civil war in Sri Lankan society as the damage the war had caused is in a range of different domains viewed from the incidents and the activities such as mass killings, abductions, family separations, and destruction of livelihood, post-traumatic stress disorders, disruption to education, internal displacement, and the emergence of refugees and so on. The war memories have resulted in causing distrust among different constituent ethnic groups of the Sri Lankan polity. Consequently, they have resulted in ill-disposed mindsets among other groups jeopardizing the reconciliation process of the country. At the end of the civil war, the government of Sri Lanka with the support of the international agencies initiated several development programmes to rebuild the affected area. It had launched large scale development projects like the Northern Spring Development Project for the Northern Province and Eastern Reawakening Development Project for the Eastern Province in the country. The critiques of the said development projects have highlighted by an overall concentration of the government that was only on the rebuilding infrastructure and some of the livelihood avenues alone. Those critiques have not laid it necessary consideration on the actual damages to the social fabric

which needed solutions for the root causes of the conflict and real contribution to the long-term healing process and any trust-building among the conflicting parties.

The ethnic policy of the post-independent state in Sri Lanka has contributed to strengthen divisions among different ethnic and religious communities. The war is a by-product of those policies. Northern and the Eastern parts of Sri Lanka are Tamil majority areas while the Southern part of the Island remains predominantly Sinhalese area. The political demography revealed that the ethnic groups are ethnically and geographically separated, and interactions between them are rarely seen, and if caught, they are usually agitated (Orjuela, 2003). At the end of the war, a process of reconciliation was initiated by the Government of Sri Lanka and still struggling to establish enduring peace in the country. However, the achievements of those initiatives have been questioned. It has been observed, even though the government official declaration of the peace initiatives and reconciliation weighted towards economic reconstruction, and there is no peace in the minds of the citizens of Sri Lanka (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), (Athas, 2009).

The reason for long lasting war in Sri Lanka has been violent culture of conflicts, societal beliefs, and collective Memory. Cumulatively, all the peace attempts have been obstructed by politically mobilized groups. Reconciliation consists of mutual acceptance and recognition, peaceful relations, and positive attitudes. In the process of reconciliation in a conflict context, Sri Lanka should ultimately lead to collective forgiveness. The normative body of knowledge acknowledges there is a mutual responsibility on the shoulders of conflicting parties to break a path to meaningful reconciliation with forgiveness, a precondition for reconciliation which requires decisions to learn new aspects about their group, learn about the rival group and to develop a vision for the future that combines both groups to establish peaceful relations (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

Research Methodology

The present study is based on the analysis of secondary data which the authors have collected for the doctoral thesis on civil war in Sri Lanka during the period from 1983 to 2009 and Reconciliation Process: Role of Memory and Interpretation in Ethnic Relations.

The authors found that the positivist epistemology alone is not sufficient to understand the impact of the war memory on a meaningful reconciliation process of any fragmented society. The major lacuna of the positivist approach in the study of this kind of complex and complicated social phenomena requires serious consideration of the ontic reality of the study subjects (Creswell, 2009). Further, the study of such phenomenon through a positivist perspective tends to design dictated studies preventing the researcher exploring the multi-dimensionality of the issue. The said doctoral study was initially intended following a positivist epistemological position. However, later, because of understanding, i.e., understanding of the feelings of the war-affected people are of equal importance, researchers decided to adopt a mixed methodology. The rationale for changing the approach was informed by the Weberian Notion of Empathetic understanding (Creswell, 2009). It was aimed at the objectification of the objectified. This paper is based on that rationale.

The authors found that there exists a rich pool of secondary sources. However, the authors themselves did collect such written documents and audio and visual sources as well (five videos on war victory memorial celebrations and publications). The thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected secondary data. The reflexive thematic methods were used in analysing the context as well as in the formulation of the interrelationship of data. Since the research was based on the secondary data, the researcher discourses formatted over the core issues of the study, which were also explored in the form of findings. In this connection, tools of critical discourse analysis were the threads that bound the data into a reflexive thematic analysis.

However, future researchers need to be aware that the present study is context-specific and might be generalizable for other contexts.

In order to understand the impact of war memorialization in the post war ethnic reconciliation process, some secondary sources were used in this study. All the amalgamated secondary data were applied reflexive thematic analysis method. Because it is essential to understand imbibed meanings of those selected secondary sources, use of reflexive approach is vital. The impact of war memorialization can best be understood through such an approach. Furthermore, reflexive thematic analysis supports analysing qualitative data to answer some questions about human experiences, views, and perceptions. In line with Braun & Clarke (2018) suggestions, following guidelines were thus taken into consideration when secondary data were analysed.

1. Familiarizing with the data

2. Generating initial codes

3. Searching for themes

4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming the identified themes

6. Producing the report

Every stage of the data analysis was reflected in line with imbibed and contextual meanings of subject's experiences to produce theoretical informed themes in this study.

Scholarship on Reconciliation

The reconciliation has been defined as a societal process that involves a mutual acknowledgement of the past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and

behaviour into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace (Lederach, 2001). The above definition recognizes that there is "a focus as well as a locus" in the reconciliation process. The focus of reconciliation is upon building new and better relationships between former enemies. Relationships are both the root cause and the long-term solution to the conflict. Thus, the connections must be the core focus for the reconciliation process. As a locus, Lederach argues, "reconciliation represents a space, a place or location of the encounter, were parties to a conflict meet" (Bar-Tal, pp. 112-24). Pholpott (2006) noted that the concept of reconciliation has an ancient meaning, which means "restoration of right relationship". Auerbach (2006) highlights that reconciliation implies both a process and an outcome. He observes there is more emphasis on the former when the reconciliation is being undertaken by any society. Accordingly, "stable peace; is the long-term goal of any process of conflict resolution. Clegg classified four categories of reconciliations; political, societal, interpersonal and personal reconciliations (2008, p.235). After defining what is meant by reconciliation, it requires the contextualization within the post-war period of Sri Lanka**.**

The scholars in the field of conflict studies shed light on the prerequisite of the post-conflict reconciliation process. They had pointed out reconciliation in post-authoritarian societies has to face the challenge of dealing with their past in the aftermath of violent confrontations (De Votta, 2013). It is because it has to be a period of transition wherein the new elites are required to select the most adequate instrument to solve their previous disputes and prevent future violent clashes (Teite, 2003; Huyse, 1996). In the above context, diverse models have been implemented from national and international criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparation projects, hybrid courts, to name a few. In their reconciliation efforts, some countries have looked into their traditional practices to establish culturally sensitive procedures. Some others have preferred to transplant foreign models. Furthermore, there are alternative measures such as truth commissions which are more likely to deal with the victim's experience.

It can be stated that Sri Lanka has opted to embrace different ways to deal with the past. Interestingly, 'reconciliation' is the catchword used in the public debates in post-war Sri Lanka.

However, it has implemented several activities for the post-war reconciliation such as development projects and implementing recommendations of the Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission. The policymakers, leaders of civil organizations, intellectuals and diplomats often refer to the process of reconciliation between the different ethnic groups that constitute Sri Lanka (Rambukwella, 2012). The reconciliation is not an easy endeavour. It requires a reflection of the past, which is a painful process, yet it contributes to the construction of sustainable peace. It is a process that needs to be initiated simultaneously both at individual and community levels. It becomes meaningful if the process replaces Fear by non-violent coexistence facilitating building confidence and trust. It leads towards empathy (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2003, p. 20).

Sri Lanka entered to that space with the military victory over its main rival in 2009. As Sri Lanka is in the phase of transitional justice, Sri Lanka's necessity of looking into strategies for easing the historical tension which is highlighted by many (Tambiah, 1997). The government-backed strategies of dancing to the tune of majoritarian politics will be resisted by the minorities allowing the politically sponsored remembrance projects by the political entrepreneurs (ibid). The post-war governments in Sri Lanka have adopted different strategies in the sphere of reconciliation. It was observed that some had adopted different attitudes toward reconciliation (Bastian, 2003). It can be observed there lacks a concern on the feelings of community. Addressing them is very important at the transitional justice phase of conflict resolution (Bloomfield, 2003). The transitional justice paves the way for healing the war-affected people and also people who are responsible for war crimes. But in the context of Sri Lanka that was not successful due to the lack of proper mechanism.

Another essential step of the reconciliation process is truth-seeking. If transitional justice step were a success, the truth-seeking process could be achieved easily. However, these steps have also not been successful. The government established the Lesson Learned and Reconciliation Commission to address these issues. Mainly, there is a need to understand and address war memories to engage in a meaningful process of reconciliation. The government is not concerned about easing the war tension created through war memories. The War memory has been defined as emotional depictions of war experiences that carry along in the minds and lives of the war victims. They encompass personal and collective memories of war experiences.

The Collective Memory is defined by Halbwachs, (2002) as the shared pool of information held in the memories of two or more members of a group. Collective memory can be shared, passed on and constructed by a group (Burke, 1989) it can also refer to the collectively shared representations of the past by community members (ibid). The collective and individual memory has been memorialized from the ancient period up to now (Colman, 1992). Memorialization is generally referred to as the process of preserving memories of people or events. It can be a form of address or petition or a ceremony of remembrance or a commemoration. The act of remembering can be considered as a tangible framework for memorialization. Keeping actual items for the recollection of the past memories within popular consciousness is a memorialization (Pierre, 2008).

Expectations and Failure of Reconciliation Efforts in Sri Lanka

In 2009, the government of Sri Lanka took control of areas under the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). At this juncture, the local and international community expected that the government would take steps to heal the wounds of war war's wounds and address to the ethno- nationalist grievances that caused the conflict (De Votta, 2013) It is the nature of human to love the loved ones after the

humanitarian disasters of war. For the purpose of memory of the loved ones, both sides involved in the conflict took initiatives to remember them.

There are several war monuments and memorials in the country dedicated to war heroes which aim at celebration and glorification. They have been sponsored by both camps engaged in the conflict. One can observe that there are many war monuments dedicated to perceived heroes of the group. There is a war victory monument erected by the government in *Baththaramulla*, a township close to the capital of Colombo. It has recorded the names of all the government soldiers who lost their lives during the civil war.

Further, the government annually sponsors national victory day celebration, whenever the celebration is held the place gets decorated and illuminated. Apart from establishing monuments, some cultural activities, especially those sponsored by Buddhist clergy such as *Boodhi Puja, pirith (religious ceremonies are followed by the Buddhist people)* chanting etc. to remember war heroes. On the other hand, the minority party to the conflict attempts their best to keep alive the memories of the war by activities such as issuing of calendars as an example commemoration ceremony are held at *Mulliwaiikkal*[8] war monument. Further, it can be observed there are roads in several parts of the country named after the deceased soldiers by the community and government honouring soldiers who lost their lives in the name of freedom of the motherland as a political strategy to attract people to the governing party. Building bus halts and community halls in several areas of the country is another activity to memorialize war heroism. Apart from these activities, main war monuments have been established in Northern and Eastern part of the country prioritizing *Puthukuduirippu, Mulliwaikkal, Kilinochchi and Elephant Pass*[9] to remember war victory and war heroes to symbolize the defeat of the enemies of the government which dance mainly to the tune of Sinhalese Buddhists. The military power and the ideology promoted by the state aimed at establishing Sinhala

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[8] *The place which the LTTE Leader killed by the Government Army forces*
[9] *Main Army bases of the government during the civil war period*

Buddhist Hegemony among the Minority Tamils. In this context, the perception of the northern people of war memorial is pertinent.

Northerners' Perception of War Memories

It has been revealed the perception of conflict by the people of Northern and Eastern parts of the country is complex. There have been supporters as well as rivals to the LTTE dominated administration during their hey days of war. It is observed that many of the Northerners willingly or unwillingly had to engage with LTTE during the war. It is said that LTTE used to recruit civilians with and without their consent. The civilians who were forcefully recruited to the organization expressed their worries about the actions they were compelled to do during armed conflict. Their expressions have been indicative of their repent for the acts they had done even under forceful environment. The people who live in war-prone areas started to commemorate their family members after the end of war individually. They have built tombs and statues in memory of the people who lost their lives during war. The memorials during the war time have been cleaned up by the LTTE during the war and organized community war memorials at village levels. The war heroes' memorials and public ceremonies have been used to attract more and more to the organization and keep its popular base of support.

From 1989 onwards, the LTTE commenced paying organized public tribute to its fallen combatants through memorials and ceremonies. When on November 27, 1989, the LTTE's late leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran announced a national day of collective commemoration for Tamil War heroes which is commonly known as "Mahaveer Naal" (Heroes' Day). Apart from naming *Mahaviru Day*, in *Vishvamadu* area, there is a cemetery built to commemorate 4000 resistant fighters. Later, this was bulldozed by the government. Not only LTTE memorials but also Tamil community war memorials were demolished in the post-war era of the country erased the name of national security. Despite resistance to separatism and desire to resolve the conflict, the government had dismally failed to realize the genuine

human bond of a group which continues to remember their members with a sense of spirituality.

The ethnic rivalry between the majoritarian government and the minorities that expressed desire to their cultural autonomy continues despite the cessation of the war hostilities between the two communities have entwined in the conflict.

End of the War and Unmet Dawn of Peace

Even though the war ended eleven years ago, and people are still waiting for the dawn of sustainable peace to Sri Lanka. To achieve sustainable peace, it is crucial to conceive reconciliation and peace differently. In this process the reconciliation of memory is very important. LTTE Community-led memory initiatives that do not have a state sanction can, and indeed has taken more liberal and creative forms over the years. Memory initiatives can assist all communities. The special memories of a community are very important which directly affects to initiate the reconciliation process.

The symbolic nature of war monuments and victory celebrations represent only the heroism of the war. The war memorialization discloses a fraction of a dominant system. Symbolically speaking, through the paradigm of war memorials, the state has introduced a dominant site of memory where the government dominated. The dominant site of memory represents only heroism, and the civilian remembrance has simply been forgotten by the memorialization process.

In the post-war scenario, the war memorialization is conducted by both parties: The Sri Lankan government and the Tamil community. The majority Sinhalese celebrates the war victory celebration on May 18 annually with the support of the Sri Lankan government. They glorify the war heroism on the day of the victory celebration. The Tamil community celebrates the war heroes on the day of "Mahaviru", and it falls on November 27 annually to commemorate the slain LTTE leader Prabhakaran's birthday and the LTTE carders who were killed while fighting

for Tamil Eelam. The war monuments have been constructed by both parties, and only carders and their heroism have been glorified by both the parties using these monuments and memorials. The monuments have been built all over the country by the victory parties and losers. The state practice of memorialization has been selective. Even in the Eastern and Northern regions are dotted with several war monuments erected by the estate to glorify the victory of the armed forces and glorify the heroism of warriors. The loss of civilian life during the war is not accounted for any of the monuments. The civilians of the Eastern and Northern regions have attempted to construct civilian memorials in the past. It has met with legal injunctions. The community memorials, which were banned by the government, serve as virtual spaces both for grief and for community gatherings. Their memorialization of the civilians who passed away has been met with the legal injunctions because they were a threat to the national security. The community memorialization processes of the North and Eastern region of the country have been banned by the state on the perception of being an attempt of glorifying the LTTE. Though it was prohibited and banned, still civilians are awaiting to memorialize their loved ones in the proper way. Though there are several monuments regarding the war and celebrating the war heroism, there are only two civilian war memorials in the Northern region of the country. Due to the memorialization of the civilians who died during the war, collectively shares the pain, sufferings and loses of the lay people.

The memory and truth are significant to build an era of some transnational justice, and it will be more helpful to the post-conflict reconciliation process (Laderach, 1997). The transnational justice is understood as the conception of justice associated with the period of political changes, which is characterized by legal responses to confront the wrongdoing repressive of the predecessor regimes. Depending on their nature, the transitional justice mechanism is either perpetrator or victim-oriented (ibid)

The collective memory provides solidarity and continuity; these groups modify the memory of the past according to the necessities of the present. This is a dynamic process of constructing the history, and of generating a collectively shared gift which is based on an 'agreed' shared past. It was observed that neither the past nor the present is before each other. It was observed that how the past is active in the present constructions, notions, and values of present social frameworks, and on the other hand how the present has control over forming the past about meeting its current needs. The past and the present are always in interaction in the collective memory of groups since the continuity and solidarity of groups are essential for their survival.

The personal memorialization effort, like community initiatives, takes various forms to express and remind that, which may have forgotten, they hold deep meaning and personal significance in a way that no other initiative can afford the space to express. The personal memory initiatives encompass anything about alms giving, book dedications, art installations, documentations of incidents, photographs, and storytelling.

Even after a settlement is reached and a peace agreement is signed, this is by no means the end of the war. The settlement has to be implemented. If it is just a war between two people, this may not be hard: those two groups' people do what they agree to do, and the past problems may be solved. In addition, the elite negotiated the agreement, their constituents also have to agree to the settlements, or else the deal is likely to fail. Usually, there is a long period of peacebuilding from the grass-root level of people, eventually culminating in apology, forgiveness and reconciliation. The reconciliation itself is a highly complicated, contested term. Some see it as simply the coexistence, others respect, and for some others, a mutual forgiveness.

Trust is the keystone of the reconciliation, and trust is the glue that holds relationships, societies, and economies together. The war results in the

breakdown of confidence, and that is why its rebuilding is a core element of peacebuilding. It is essential overcoming fragmentation and reducing animosities for successful implementation of peacebuilding. Trust can be built through reconciliation because reconciliation is the meaning itself that bridges the gap in the present scenario between the ill-disposed community in the past context. In the context of Sri Lanka, building trust and truth-seeking there not been successful because there were no proper mechanisms for these activities. Both conflicting parties did not meet, and they could not share their pain and apology between them. They only focused on building up the physical infrastructure. But what should be done is to prepare the ground to healing these conflicting parties and intermediated civilians.

The war had torn social fabric. Mistrust roams in all relationships. In such a sense, even a minor problem can increase into significant violence. By giving secure places for discussions, inter -peace helps societies to re-establish trust through the collaborative identification and removing hurdles towards existing peace and the provision of a solution to common issues. The reconciliation is a process of society involving an interpersonal understanding of the past suffering and the changing of hostile attitudes and behavioural patterns into creative and hopeful relationships towards lasting peace. To gain interpersonal relationships, this definition focuses on the critical building blocks in the post-conflict reconciliation. It acts on changes in emotion all attitudes and behaviour. The definition emphasizes that reconciliation is a social process after an armed struggle and works on differences within and between former riotous groups after ending the war. Eventually, it shows that reconciliation is a process not a specific situation at a particular moment in future. This definition is parallel to the others who see reconciliation as a pragmatic process in which relations are rebuilt to enable coexistence and sustainable peace. According to the responses, and it could be identified that before the war, there had been a friendly relationship among the people of this area. These people are waiting to build such a relationship that they had maintained before the black July in 1983.

According to the social identity theory, people get much of their identity from the groups they belong to. The significance of having a positive self-image is very essential for humans and by comparison with other groups. This target is obtained by accessing once in the group more reasonably than out of the group related to the significant problems. By bearing the similar beliefs and sharing their thoughts of the group system be a part of that favourable group.

War memories can be affected in various ways. First, in what way the consequences, the communities remember the violent past and how memories of the war can fuel conflict or, in another way, how it can be brought under peace and reconciliation and how to deal with painful memories. It is affirmed that way, and not much revealed how the war memories were instrumented in mode to evoke the bitter past, to create conflicts. It instigates ethnic disruptions among the harmonious people who lived together for years. The memories are significant in the period of transitional justice towards a reconciliation process. The memorialization process is a critical consideration in the process of transitional justice. The context of healing is another important phenomenon in the process of reconciliation. The memorialization is very important as a healing process. The collective remembering of the past affects the current situation of the conflict (Atkinson et al., 1973).

The memory initiatives can be a great healer and an enabler of reconciliation, paving ways and opportunities for dialogues, understanding, apologizing, acknowledging and addressing the past violence between divided societies (Luhrmann, 2015). The memorialization can play a role in truth-seeking, justice, reparations and guaranteeing non-repetition. However, history is witnessed that the memorialization has been manipulated to take the cultural memory of the hegemonic groups into the climax. As Evans (1997) pointed out, "the cultural memory is constructed". The erasure of the memory and the memorialization of 'the other' has been justified in the ideological formations of the 'hegemonic'.

The memorialization has become an art in the present context; memorials occupy an eternal place in the scenery of numerous countries. By definition, monuments have been described as spaces "invested with meaning" that is set aside to remember (Baddeley, 1997). In devising an explanation of the term "memorial," researchers have been keen on noting that care must be taken to avoid incorrectly using the word "memorial" in place of the word "monument" (Bajoria, 2016). According to Gough (2016), what differentiates the two terms is the intent of preserving and remembering that is accompanied by memorializing, while monuments usually project celebratory sentiments. As a process, memorializing is marked by activities and actions done to mourn and remember people, places, and things of importance in society. As Bastian (2003) noted, these practices provide the opportunity for people to "celebrate the lives of those who died, to mourn their passing, and to inscribe memories of the deceased in the public consciousness."

The memorialization is a vital tool in addressing conflict situations where years of repression, social inequality and injustice have created polarized communities. The memory initiatives can be a great healer and an enabler of reconciliation, paving ways, and opportunities for dialogue, understanding, apologizing, acknowledging, and addressing the past violence between divided societies.

The memory initiatives can address grievances that are not captured fully by the structures promised by the government while bringing together communities who have suffered similar issues such as disappearances, which were common during the 30-year conflict. End of the no prisoner war and the defeat of the LTTE as the broadest embodiment of Tamil resistance against an authoritarian and neo-colonial Sri Lanka state left a void in the Tamil territorial and social landscape. The destruction and the subsequent absence of Tamil war memorials of the post-war is in itself not just an act of humiliation and subjugation of a people and a nation. With the collapse of war memorials, the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan state was bound to be re-established.

The Tamil war memorials as challenges and contestation to the Majority, Sinhala state's narration of the past readers of the present were successfully erased from the war-torn Tamil homeland and people. With the government mediated erasing of Tamil memorials, paves the way for wholly disapproved war memorials for the post-war Tamils in Sri Lanka.

A State can play a critical role in either healing or dividing communities, further through any national memorialization initiatives. It takes up during their tenure in government. To this end, successive governments must adopt a balanced approach to memorialization, by way of a national policy on memorialization.

The memorialization can play a crucial role in this respect and is a critical hurdle to overcome any approach to transitional justice. It can be a tool to heal, to combat impunity and achieve durable peace where similar violence is not systematically repeated. A sensible, sensitive, nuanced approach to memorialization can act as a tool for reconciliation and healing.

The continued repression can only lead to more violence, and this is something the government must take note of in its reconciliation attempts. These various forms of ad hoc obstructions to memorialization, be it from the government of the day or by non-State actors-there have been a point of frustration for many affected families. However, they have braved these threats, intimidation, obstructions, and restrictions to remember, despite fears of reprisal, their loved ones. Their courage is testimony to the innate human quality, and they need to be remembered.

The space for memory in the post-war Eastern and Northern areas of Sri Lanka is dominated by the triumphant discourse, which denies freedom for an alternative narration, making the truth of the losers. All are victims are annually waiting to commemorate their lost loved ones. Today victims still need to struggle to remember their dead ones despite intimidation and surveillance. Why would there be the extra deployment of military, police, and other intelligence services on the day

of mourning? On the verge of national consultations if people have no space for memorialization, how would there be a space for free expression of what people need in terms of a just mechanism.

Concluding Observation

Memorializing the people who died in the war and airing the grievances of the people need to be recognized as a right of the people in a meaningful reconciliation process. But after the war, the memorials of memories are dominated by the influential political persons and designed according to their agendas. In the post-war context, the war memorialization was handled by parties, and only they glorify their war heroism. The monuments have been constructed all over the country by the victorious parties, and losers as well; war monuments have limited in the northern part of the country. The state practice of memorialization has been selective and aimed at ethnic chauvinism. Even in the eastern and northern regions, some places are dotted with several war monuments erected by the state to glorify the victory of the armed forces and glorify the heroism of warriors. Since the governmental power is being claimed by the victorious, the monumental emotions of the victorious are formed.

The memorialization should be a process of consensus making and leads to social justice. It was observed that people-oriented memorialization makes the people take ownership of memorialization and develop solidarity among them and enables the people to share the pains and sorrows of the conflict. Due to the memorialization, the civilians who lost their loved ones during the war, collectively share the pain, sufferings, and losses of the people. The memorialization has stood as a powerful method of expressing and giving life to counter-narratives and contesting ideologies where multiple narratives have mainly been unwelcome. It can play a crucial role to heal, to combat impunity, to reconcile and achieve sustainable peace where similar violence is not systematically repeated. In this respect, the government must initiate, at this crucial juncture, a National Policy on Memorialization that binds current and

future governments to abiding by best principles and practices. Suppose Sri Lanka wants to engage in meaningful reconciliation. In that case, it needs to recognize the necessity of healing grievances allowing spiritual necessity of remembering their loved ones and constructing memorials and monuments in such a way to enable people to learn the negative aspects of the war irrespective of eulogizing the military victory over its people.

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