Discussion Paper 1

Challenges and Opportunities for Memorialisation in Sri Lanka: Grassroots reflections

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The Community Memorialisation Project, Sri Lanka

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1. Post-war memorialisation and its uses

Memorialisation – which is broadly seen as a publicly acknowledged, and publicly performed exercise of remembrance that is different in scope to a private remembrance - is a key consideration in post-war reconciliation and transitional justice. "Memory is subjective and fluid as it examines, reinterprets, and addresses the issues of the past, thereby helping the formation of new identities" [1]. The act of memorializing in itself is "as much about shaping the future as it is about recollecting the past" [2]. If we, as a country, are serious about creating a Sri Lankan identity that is unified yet infused with cultural, religious, ethnic, social and political pluralism, then an adequately diverse memorialisation process is a key consideration in the process of transitional justice.

In the context of healing, the act of telling, for all sides of a conflict, is an important step in the process of reconciliation, building understanding and empathy for the other and non-recurrence of violence. Many personal 'truths' exist and they need to be shared. Creating the space for individuals and groups to be able to remember their version of the 'truth' as lived experience, allow the narrators to feel that they are acknowledged, counted and remembered. In our own history, a lack of such processes in the 80s, 90s may have contributed to the resurgence of deep-rooted causes of conflict and violence. Judging by our history, therefore, it is abundantly clear that just and sustainable peace is not possible if the psychological effects of violence and war, as well as the root causes of conflicts, are not adequately dealt with, discussed and acknowledged. The psychosocial benefits of externalising ones memories, deep-rooted pain or pride, long-held feelings of disenfranchisement or neglect, and entrenched fears or suspicion of the 'other', can be unburdened through memorialisation. The absolute 'truth' may not matter as much as freeing one's own voice from that of another[3] and releasing oneself from the culture of silence.

In the seven years since the end of the war, and the decades since other incidents of violence including the experiences of expulsion, riots and violence against Muslims and the JVP insurrections in the South, the notion of the victorious versus the vanquished has determined whose memories and remembrances are valid. Memorialisation, when State-sanctioned can be skewed towards remembering individuals, incidents or sites specific to significant military actions (loss or victory) at best, or triumphalist glorification of war at worst. There is little balance, in memorialising the loss of civilian or 'all' Sri Lankan life lost in the 26 years of open warfare. There are practical difficulties of State-centric memorialisation in finding 'a common narrative' to publicly remember a context fraught with complexity, and multiple versions and perspectives of the 'truth'. It is therefore necessary to devise a multi-layered memorialisation process.

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1   Please see Practice Paper 1, for an in-depth discussion of memorialisation of the Herstories Project and the Community Memorialisation Project - https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Practice-note-1-Memorialisation_Final.pdf
2   Rigney, 251
3   Bhaktin as quoted in De Silva, 62

2. A few examples of global experiences of memorialisation

At the outset, it must be noted that there is no one-size-fits-all standard for memorialisation. Each exercise in preserving, archiving, dealing with the past and memorialising histories is an unique process, where the process itself is as important as what, where, how, who, why and by whom something is memorialised. In this context, it is obvious that global experiences should not be copied or replicated in their entirety, but used as examples from which Sri Lanka might draw from to develop our own, home grown process of memorialisation.

Spaces of reflection and sites of memory – In some cases, such as the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Killing Fields in Cambodia[4] or The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum[5], *the site of memory itself*, was preserved and converted to a museum space for viewing and reflection, a generation after the event. The conditions for preservation of a *place* of memory was done after Government policies and practices for memorialisation, and the general public were able to deal with the past, objectively, with the distance of time.

Memorialisation of individual experience as private-public memory – Some cases such as the Stolpersteine project[6], which installs a memory plaque in the street with the name and details of a person who suffered under the Nazis that individuals can apply to have their family members and ordinary citizens remembered, and the Silent Heroes Museum in Berlin[7], which memorialises those individuals that saved Jews during the Holocaust based on

Source of image: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f8/Cheung_Ek_-_Killing_Fields_Site_-_Cambodia_-_02.JPG

The killing fields in Cambodia is preserved as a site of conscience and memory, where the Khmer Rouge carried out mass genocide under its infamous leader, Pol Pot.

details and their objects of memory, are efforts that originally began as *artists' or civil society initiatives for the preservation of memory*, that found Government support after a memory policy was established.

Museum, archives and memorials – In cases such as the Rwanda Genocide Memorial and Learning Centre[8], The Genocide Archive of Rwanda[9], the Government policy post-war, within a generation of the event, created documentation centres for remembering and archiving the detailed records of atrocities and deaths. The Serbian Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication[10], similarly works with families of victims to document and archive information that may result in identifying the many disappeared and lost during the Serbian aggression, including details and witness accounts from the Screbinca Massacre.

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4   http://www.killingfieldsmuseum.com/s21-victims.html
5   http://auschwitz.org/en/
6   http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/home/
7   http://www.orte-der-erinnerung.de/en/institutions/institutions_liste/silent_heroes_memorial_centre/druckversion.html
8   http://www.kgm.rw
9   http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Welcome_to_Genocide_Archive_Rwanda
10   http://crdp-ks.org/en/programs/

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe[11], which is an expression of Germany's official commitment to a culture of memorialisation and remembrance, The Jerusalem Yad Vashem Memorial Complex[12] and Peru's Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion[13] are situated within the purview of the Ministry of Culture, thus linking memorialisation to a cultural expression rather than to a political expression. These are some cases, where memorialisation and archiving has developed into *State-supported spaces* for objective documentation and preservation of memory, not necessarily at a site of incident.

Public expressions of solidarity and memorialisation – The National Day of Commemoration in Ireland, on 11th July, commemorates all Irish people that have died in past wars or UN peacekeeping missions with multiple ceremonies at national and local levels. On January 27th, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorates all victims of the Nazi Holocaust. These public

Source of image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stolpersteine_Marx_Jonassohn_Rommerskirchen.jpg

The Stolpersteine Project, literally meaning 'stumbling block' are cobblestones buried into pavements that memorialises the names or victims of the Holocaust. They are usually situated outside where the victims originally lived or were last seen before being taken to death camps with the caption 'Here lived ...'. They are seen in all the countries of occupied Nazi Germany where Jews were exterminated.

expressions of solidarity on days reserved and sanctioned by the international community or a Government of a country, *provides 'structured' experience – as an universally acknowledged day - yet with the freedom for the public/individuals to choose (or not choose) to commemorate* their loved ones or collective inter-generational memories of a set of specific incidents or timeframes.

These cases and glimpses into the global experience of memorialisation highlight that there are parallel processes of memorialisation; that top-down processes can exist simultaneously with organic community-based private memorialisation; and that a staggered or staged process has evolved or has been intentionally adopted as a memorialisation strategy in many countries. In each of these examples, there have been many different layers of opportunities for memorialisation encouraged:

❍ By the *State*, at a *national* level, in the context of commemoration, archiving of documentation and information, preserving sites of memory, by allocating a day of remembrance and by creating museums.

❍ By *civil society actors including artists at a national or local level*, where projects are created to archive, commemorate or showcase a specific incident, event, people or a time period through structures, collective actions or movements and through the arts.

❍ By *individuals at village or community level,* memorialising private memories of individuals. These may sometimes be susceptible to communalism or the prioritising of a particular set of biases, victimisations or prejudices because it is entirely grassroots driven, owned, produced and shared. However, the notion that many truths co-exist,

11 http://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en/memorials/the-memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe.html)
12 http://www.yadvashem.org
13 http://lum.cultura.pe

and the expression of those 'truths', as long as they are not hateful or harmful to justice and peace, are relevant to the process of memorialisation needs to be acknowledged.

All these however, are susceptible to being manipulated by hostile elements in society or can cause injury or hurt to disenfranchised or marginalised groups of people unable or fearful to express themselves. A policy of memorialisation itself, may exclude some people or revise history thus marginalising some voices, or allude to a nationalist priority rather than objectively memorialising an event. For example, the plaque memorialising the destruction of the library in Sarajevo states "on this place Serbian criminals in the night of the 25th – 26th August 1992 set on fire the national and university's library ... do not forget, remember and warn". When memorialisation an incident, such language could incite nationalist passions. Memorialisation therefore should not cause harm through exclusion, half-truths with limited information and background or offense to peoples' sensibilities that may exacerbate or reignite the root causes of conflict or a resurgence of violence.

3. Sri Lankan experiences of remembrance and memorialisation

The Sri Lankan experience also consists of State-centred initiatives, commemorations and remembrances; civil-society and/or artists' led initiatives for remembrance; and religious, traditional or private memorials and processes initiated at the individual or community levels.

Memorials and preservation of sites – State-sponsored memorials in the aftermath of the war or a major battle victory - such as the Elephant Pass memorial, and the Puthukudiyiruppu war museum and war memorial in Mullaitivu – highlight a post-war narrative of triumphalism; the collapsed water tower in Kilinochchi, left after the LTTE blew it up lies as a reminder of LTTE brutality towards its own people; in Battaramulla, the names of the fallen armed forces adorn walls of granite as statues of soldiers stand in dignified remembrance at junctions and towns, not necessarily whence they originated; even the post-war infrastructure development marries 'normalcy' such as roads and parks with 'memorialisation' such as plaques and other reminders of the 'cost' of peace. The decommissioned tank in the middle of a wetland park in Nugegoda is such as example of anachronistic and out-of-place remembrances. Perhaps, most starkly different are the sites of war, such as Prabhakharan's bunker in PDK, and the sea-tiger training/ swimming pool in Visuvamadu, which are imbued with propaganda (images of child soldiers juxtaposed with images of Prabhakharan and his youngest son) that have become part of post-war tourism or 'dark' tourism[14].

Tourists take pictures of the War Hero Victory Memorial in Kilinochchi, built in 2010 to commemorate the battle for Kilinochchi. The controversial memorial in what was the heart of Tamil Eelam raises questions about the representation of the victorious and the vanquished in post-war narratives.

Oral history and memorialisation projects online – The Herstories Project[15], The Community Memorialisation Project[16], The Humans of Northern Sri Lanka Project[17] are a few examples of civil society online archives of peoples' histories. These memorialisation projects are developed through oral histories of volunteers, and shared widely through social media and online spaces for the purpose of archiving memories. These publicly accessible projects, share the stories with other communities, which facilitates understanding and reconciliation through empathy and compassion. This highlights one of the uses of memorialisation projects, as they can become more than static archives of information, but a catalyst for dialogue.

Using the Arts for memorialisation – Throughout the war and after, many Sri Lankan artists have consistently and continuously memorialised the Sri Lankan conflict and its effects through their art. Chandraguptha Thenuwara's serial memorialisation of the '83 pogrom against the Tamils, the mural on Kynsey Road, Colombo 08, where Neelan Tiruchelvam was shot dead (now erased), the memorials to the student deaths in Embilipitiya designed by Jagath Weerasinghe (now paved over by a parking lot for Diyatha Uyana) are examples of such memorialisation

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14   Amarasingham and Hyndman, 567, http://www.yorku.ca/jhyndman/pdf/ GeographyCompass-14.pdf
15   www.herstoryarchive.org
16   www.facebook.com/CommunityMemorialisationProject
17   www.facebook.com/humansofnorthernsrilanka

initiatives. The "Dear Children…Sincerely Project", based on interviews with 80-year old Sri Lankans devised by Ruwanthi De Chickera, and 'Remembering November' by Floating Space are both examples of theatre projects that build on historical memory. These are not necessarily permanent structures or installations but they showcase the importance of the arts, as a space for and avenue for public memorialisation and debate.

The Herstories Project is an archival project by Radhika Hettiarachchi implemented together with Viluthu, Centre for Human Resource Development in 2012-2013 to document and preserve the stories of women in conflict.

Source of image: www.herstoryarchive.org

Community-based, and religious memorialisation at the grassroots – Possibly the most grassroots driven and community-owned memorialisation process is in private remembrance. These isolated, personally symbolic gestures of private remembrance of heroism, personal loss or religious merit for departed souls, can be significantly less controversial, partisan or agenda-free than the political and socio-cultural agendas that may sometimes drive or underlie public memorialisation exercises. For example, bus stops commemorating a dead soldier on the roadside of his/her village; grave stones and plaques (although LTTE cemeteries no longer exist in some places thus erasing the physical memorials to the personal loss of many families); a wall, a well, or other donated structure in a temple, an yearly alms giving, a shramadana to clean up a cemetery or a light ceremony at a temple, kovil or church (pahan pooja). In some cases, such locally driven memorialisation can be painful and may carry the biases, and ethnic dimensions of certain community identities and ideologies. These however, are generally discussed, negotiated and accepted by the villagers in discussion with each other, through religious leaders or community leaders and is therefore in most cases, representative.

A bus shelter in memory of a father and a 'ranaviru' or war-hero son, built by the family of the deceased. Such family or community-led public memorials are a common sight in the South.

Source of image: Radhika Hettiarachchi, 2016

4. Key findings and challenges in practicing memorialisation

The following findings are based on evidence emerging from on-going discussions, consultations and documentation of life-histories[18] with district and division based Government officials, religious and community leaders, CBO representatives and individuals that participated in community-based group meetings totalling 684 individuals[19] from 41 villages[20].

Should we remember or should we forget?

The Herstories Project, housed at Viluthu Centre for Human Resource Development, conducted in 2012-2013 to memorialise the experiences, courage and hope of mothers, and by extension, their families during the war, collected 285 women's oral histories[21]. Originally only 100 life histories were planned, although the number increased to 285, because women started approaching the project team to ask that their life stories be included online as well as at the National Archives. This 185% increase in the voluntary submission of life histories, at a time when the political and security environment was oppressive and when formal and inclusive mechanisms for transitional justice were as yet politically unfeasible, indicate their desire to tell, be heard, memorialise and archive their life stories. Four years later, the project team of the Community Memorialisation Project, (housed at Search for Common Ground Sri Lanka since January 2016), is discovering a marked difference in the 'need', interest and willingness to memorialise as it approaches villagers. Although, most people are happy to share their stories and archive them, there are some individuals and community leaders -approximately 20% of those consulted - who do not want to memorialise their experiences or their losses for the following reasons (in no particular order)[22]-

❍ They have moved on with their lives - with new community infrastructure, housing and lives resettled even partially, schooling back on track and employment opportunities available. As such some people simply choose to forget as it is 'in the past' and 'what's happened has happened';

❍ They have long since memorialised their dead and their own suffering through community-based religious ritual or 'karmic' purifications. As such, they indicated any mechanism for justice now is irrelevant, intrusive and would not serve any purpose for them while their current, and neglected needs are economic and infrastructure development;

❍ Similarly, in the North, some have long-since memorialised their dead and eased their own suffering with religious and ritualistic practices but are uncomfortable with memorialisation and 'justice' because of the presence of military or alleged CID surveillance. This indicates that demilitarisation and trust-building might need to precede large-scale, Government sponsored memorialisation efforts;

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18 While a more detailed analysis of the data, and life histories will follow in an overall report, this submission will be limited to anecdotal experiences and findings emerging from the project so far.

19 207 women and 59 of men in Ampara, 116 women and 42 of men in Mannar, 148 women and 112 of men in Matara.

20 Uthayapuram, Sammanturai, Malaiyadikiraman, Sarvodayapuram, Veeramunai, Sangamankanda, Block J, Block J –West, 01,02, East -01, Pottuvil, Komari-01, Selvapuram, Manalchenai, Aththimunai, Kalukollai, Senkamam, Gonagolla, Uhana from Ampara district; Yonakapura, Poruthota, Nilwella, Beliwatte, Dikwella, Dandeniya, Batogoda, Wilpita, Godapitiya, Deniyaya from Matara district; Salamban-Manthai, Adampan, Muthuraiputhurai-Arrippu, Verpankulam, Puliyakulam, Kumanankulum, Mannar town, Seelavathurai, Pesalei, Savariyapurum, Vankalai-Puthukudiyirippu from Mannar district

21 Life histories were recorded in Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi districts in the North, Kurunegala and Monaragala districts in the South and Batticaloa and Ampara districts in the East.

22 Only preliminary findings, impressions and anecdotal evidence based on the interviews and village-based discussions in the Mannar, Ampara and Matara are cited here. Written and verbal responses are currently being coded and analysed.

❍ Unlike in the immediate aftermath of the war, economic support has lessened as a result of which, some people are not interested in the 'soft' initiatives of transitional justice such as memorialisation, hoping for economic support instead;

❍ Some people are impatient with the slow pace of post-war transitional justice processes and see formalised processes as unnecessary obstacles to moving on with life;

❍ Finding out what happened to disappeared loved ones still seem to be the primary need related to transitional justice, rather than memorialisation in order of priority. It is difficult to memorialise the 'missing' as there is no conclusive proof of their whereabouts. The issues of the disappeared and missing needs to be addressed deeply and effectively before memorialisation can happen for some;

❍ Some people are fearful that revisiting the past to remember, deal with or memorialise, might trigger memories, cause pain and possibly incite communal violence and/or a resurgence of war;

❍ Some people in the North see the destruction of memorials (such as martyr graves) as 'lost' and irrecoverable physical memorials and as such do not trust formal State-led memorialisation efforts as being impartial or capable of remembering 'all' lives lost.

These responses to the introduction of memorialisation opportunities at village level highlight a surprising trend that policy makers, practitioners and civil society organisations might not have anticipated. They raise a few questions – Whose need is it to memorialise our shared past? As in some of the global experiences, memorialisation needs may have subsided as peoples' priorities have changed to socio-economic concerns rather than reclaiming political spaces and the space for private memories. It may therefore be simultaneously too early (in other conflict contexts, it has happened a generation later, after demilitarisation and public prosecutions) and too late (it could have happened immediately after the war), for State-mediated memorialisation. In a situation of such contrasting needs, what should the role of the State be?

Are we caught up in a 'cult of memory'? "Remembrance, however important a role it may play in the life of groups, and whatever moral and ethical demands it responds to, carries risks. Is it possible that whereas forgetting does an injustice to the past, remembering does an injustice to the present? To put the dilemma even more bluntly, remembrance may be the ally of justice, but it is no reliable friend to peace, whereas forgetting can be[23]". Writer David Rieff rejects the notion that justice, and by extension memorialisation is an essential prerequisite for lasting peace, whereas forgetting might be until people are ready to do so objectively, perhaps a generation later as in the case of many conflict contexts from around the world.

Source of image: Radhika Hettiarachchi, 2017

The new memorial to 'Hasalaka Gamini', the hero of the Elephant Pass battle, who ran into an on-coming armoured LTTE vehicle with grenades, not only saved the day and many lives, but cemented him within the pantheon of southern heroes of the war. Previously, only the armoured vehicle was placed here as a memorial. The construction of the elaborate memorial 'museum' raises several questions about the intent of such a site.

23   Rieff, David, 'The cult of memory: when history does more harm than good'. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/mar/02/cult-of-memory-when-history-does-more-harm-than-good

However, both remembering and forgetting can deform a society and manipulate history supported by distorted collective memories of people. If so, why are we memorialising? There is no categorical answer to this question but it deserves deep discussion, and further consultation with various communities, political and social groups, at many levels in order to develop a nuanced reasoning for memorialisation in Sri Lanka.

Contested, conflicted and hostile spaces that limit opportunities for memorialisation

The concept of community is in itself fraught with complexity: Is it a village? Is it an ethno-social group? Is it a group of people with no other commonalities except for having similar experiences or grievances? When collecting peoples' histories, the Community Memorialisation Project has come across many individuals whose stories stand in contrast to each other's even within the same ethno-social group. Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims from the same or neighbouring villages have had vastly different experiences and perceptions although they live in close proximity.

The contested memories of an incident can vary within a village between eyewitnesses themselves. For example, some residents from Veeramunai, claimed that they know who committed atrocities against them, massacring women and children in 1990. They implied the perpetrators came from neighbouring Sammanturai, or were Muslim civil defence guards, while some others in Veeramunai implied that they couldn't be sure who

Source of image: Radhika Hettiarachchi, 2015

A mother carrying a massacred child marks the events of August 12, 1990 when Muslim home-guards allegedly massacred 55 Tamil civilians inside Veeramunai's Hindu kovil where they were taking refuge. This memorial has gone through many colour schemes and is currently white.

committed the crime. This indicates that historical narratives of memory can stand in contrast and share conflicted, contesting space for legitimacy or veracity.

In Pesalai, the reason that most people felt that they no longer needed to memorialise incidents of violence (such as the allegedly retributive attack on approximately 200 civilians taking refuge at the Our Lady of Victory church by the Sri Lanka Navy), is due to perceived security threats and limited space for public demonstrations of grief. With deeper questioning, it became apparent that the reason for implying that memorialisation even after a process of truth seeking was redundant, was because of continued militarisation (the Navy camp, from where the perpetrators are believed to have come, was still in the vicinity and therefore 'good relations' were necessary to maintain the status quo). In addition, security concerns were still prevalent as several individuals indicated they feared surveillance and being questioned by the CID. In such cases, the space for memorialisation is limited by externalised hostile elements that may have vested interests in the construction of the narrative. These external threats maybe real or perceived.
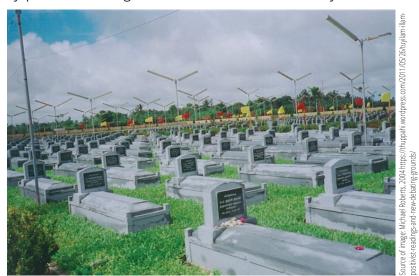
For some, the underlying need to control the narrative is due to competing motivations and the possibility of losing future opportunities. The suspicion amongst Sinhalese villagers

that any effort to memorialise the *many* narratives of war, might be in direct opposition to memorialising the sacrifices of the armed forces in ending the war has deeper perceived repercussions. There is considerable fear that not only will a wider effort to memorialise diminish the glory and position of the military, it might also lead to prosecutions tarnishing the image and dignity of the soldier as well as a loss of potential income/pension to their families. The reasons therefore are not limited to shame, but extend to socio-economic factors as well.

In some cases, sites are conflicted or contested because a military victory for one side was a complete annihilation for another. This is evident in cases such as the 'martyr' graveyards, which even as a physical memorial to lost lives for some, particularly the parents of conscripted children, is simultaneously perceived as a glorification of the LTTE cause by others. The notion that a Sri Lankan citizen should not be able to privately memorialise and erect a statue of LTTE leader Prabhakaran in his/her garden was cited as an example of the potential failure of uncontrolled memorialisation.

These historical contentions, unresolved issues of suspicion and fear, and contested spaces could be disruptions to the process of memorialisation. It therefore requires,

Source of image: Michael Roberts, 2004 https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2011/05/26/tuyilam-illam-postivist-readings-and-new-debating-grounds/

Kopay cemetery or a tuyilam illam, was an LTTE martyr memorial where there may or may not have been remains of the dead. It along with many LTTE sites of memory were destroyed in the aftermath of the war.

deeper study and understanding in order to question the existing, contradictory narratives and negotiate new public histories, particularly because Sri Lanka is a society in transition.

Grassroots traditions of memorialisation already exists heavily linked to religious, cultural and ritualistic practices

Grassroots traditions for memorialisation, based on cultural, religious and ritualistic practices already exist as described above. These practices, once done or ritualistically repeated at the grassroots level, are seen by most as adequate. For example, speaking to villagers and the temple's chief monk in Gonagolla where 54 villagers, including women and children, were allegedly hacked to death by the LTTE in 1999, the general consensus, heavily influenced by Buddhist philosophy, was that - those villagers, were fated (karma) to die that day. As such, the necessary rituals and religious rights, including alms have been given for their souls; the village has created a memorial to them; it is in the past and life has moved on since. The villagers are at peace with the neighbouring Tamil villages. As such, they did not feel that there is a 'special' need to memorialise the incident (as part of the transitional justice processes currently happening), or that 'justice' was relevant to them anymore, as justice would be served in the next birth of those that committed the act of atrocity. The general opinion was that this would only trigger buried memories and difficulties. However, it was apparent to the team that there was still much psychological damage, survivor guilt, and emotional trauma that had not been dealt with through adequate mental health support and therefore raises the question if grassroots level traditions of memorialisation is adequate for healing. However, it is clear that in the context of justice as peace and non-recurrence,

the importance of religion, and the significance of ritual and community cohesiveness - developed through strategic and sustained leadership of community/religious leaders and a deeply held belief that life must go on - was adequate for them.

This begs the question if the justice and memorialisation processes that the team believed were needed for reconciliation and healing were somehow 'imposed' and unnecessarily alien in a context where local practice, religion and ritual had continuously dealt with past trauma, in this case for 17 years, and if grassroots level community-based or personal memorialisation is preferred, then should consensus building on what to memorialise, when, where and how, be a disservice to them? Are publicly erected physical memorials, a loss of narrative for those that prefer to remember in their own way? The changing needs for memorialisation, even as seen in the past four years, needs to be acknowledged in developing a roadmap or strategy for memorialisation.

5. Process-based recommendations based on current consultations and facilitated discussions

Bearing in mind that State-sanctioned memorialisation has recently focused on the common or unifying narratives of Sri Lanka's history of violence and loss – skewed at times towards a triumphalism - in future, the State should encourage a process of 'peoples' memorialisation at the grassroots, village and district levels, with particular emphasis on individuals' memories of loss, hope, courage and survival. This needs to be preceded by an overall framework strategy for how the State will tackle memorialisation, how it builds political will and commitment to memorialisation across the board and all levels of Government, in order to create an environment conducive to all peoples of Sri Lanka acknowledging their experiences without being divisive or hateful.

Overall recommendations for memorialisation based on current findings

❍ That the *right to remember and the right to forget* be built into a layered process of memorialisation where the private, personal, community based and the national level public memorialisation co-exist depending on peoples' needs.

❍ That *consensus-driven memorials and structures*, attempting to merge many narratives into a common one, or create an amalgamated, unified 'whole' should be avoided in favour of processes that are pluralistic and acknowledge multiple narratives/needs of memorialisation.

❍ That memorialisation is a series of *low-key efforts*, prioritising community based memorialisation rather than a large-scale public exercise in political expression, which may do more harm than good in the long term.

❍ That memorialisation on a national scale be attempted if at all, only after *processes of demilitarisation and trust-building*, have moved on further.

1 Develop a National Plan and Guiding Principles for Memorialisation

A National plan for Memorialisation is needed that aims to prevent the loss of multiple narratives and to re-integrate multiple truths within policy and practice, in order to contribute to the conditions necessary for sustainable peace in post-war Sri Lanka. It is best that within this plan, the Government only sets out parameters for how the State sector and its apparatus should engage and interact with the public, private and non-state actors in the sphere of memory, rather than defining practice areas or prescriptive strategies for non-State actors. This plan should consider:

❍ What should the role of the State be? Based on evidence thus far, the primary role of the *State should be to create a policy and security environment conducive for citizens* to memorialise or not to memorialise as and when they choose.

❍ *Memorialisation should be nuanced and prioritised according to need.* Primarily the questions of 'who should lead memorialisation, what should be remembered, the intention of memorialisation, when it should happen, how it should be developed and for whom'?

❍ The *role of the arts* in memorialisation – this also raises questions on public art that commemorates or memorialises versus art in gallery spaces or private collections to which the 'public' may not have access. How could the arts foster dialogue about memory and reconciliation in public?

❍ The *need for outreach programmes* that deal with the notion of contested and pluralist narratives as opposed to one particular history that marginalises, erases or distorts multiple narratives communicated through mainstream media.

❍ The *need to develop and reform education on post-conflict Sri Lanka* while the present generation may not be ready or willing to memorialise fully, it is imperative that the next generation be given the opportunity to understand history as nuanced and perspective-driven; and to learn from the mistakes of past generations through access to multiple historical accounts, in order to avoid the mistakes of our past. A revised education system on teaching and learning history/histories and a new subject area of 'peace studies' is proposed for this inter-generational transfer of memory and learning.

❍ The *need to preserve and protect sites of significance* which, in the case of Government bodies or ministries, should have the authority to conserve and manage such sites? Should all sites of significance, military, LTTE, civilian be memorialised? Standards or best practice for respectful preservation should be developed along with possibilities for how these sites of significance can be managed and be educational without becoming sites of dark tourism?

❍ The need to manage and archive documentation for future study as well as the need for physical spaces in the capital as well as in other locations based on need as museums, archives and spaces for quiet reflection.

❍ A *set of guidelines, best practices and principles for the ethics of memorialisation*, narrative documentation, archiving based on Do No Harm principles and conflict-sensitivity should be agreed upon as part of the Memory Policy. There should also be clear guidelines on hateful, negative or fundamentalist practices that may incite violence or marginalise communities. The Herstories Project and the Community Memorialisation Project have developed a set of guidelines and principles based on international standards that could support this process

❍ Memorialisation processes that unify people, even if 'what' they memorialise is deeply personal or different, should be formalised with State patronage. These formalised and structured opportunities such as a memory walk, a day of shramadana or a specific set of religious rituals on a common day of Remembrance, could encourage unstructured and unscripted public expressions of peoples' memorialisation. These seemingly *independent acts of remembrance that allow for multiple needs and experiences, enacted simultaneously will contribute to a unifying yet personally relevant expression of public memorialisation*.

2. Conduct a comprehensive consultation and analysis on the Sri Lanka specific context and needs of memorialisation

The current concerns and needs of memorialisation that are emerging through the Community Memorialisation Project are from the Ampara, Matara and Mannar regions. A more comprehensive island-wide survey is needed in order to develop a National Policy on Memorialisation. In addition a deeper study and comparative analysis of the types and impact of global experiences should be included in the process, particularly the cases where memorialisation has caused harm, or might itself legitimise cases for negative peace. The difficult arguments surrounding the practice area of remembrance and forgetting, particularly the right to both choices needs deeper study in order to develop a memorialisation policy and process suited to the Sri Lankan needs of memorialisation.

3. Develop a publicly accessible Memory Fund for Peoples' Memorialisation

Strategic gestures of symbolic value are agenda-driven and sit within the purview of the privileged, politically, socially and culturally. A proliferation of small acts, mushrooming across the country, without cohesive agendas can have great overall impact. As such, a Memory Fund should be instituted where individuals, families and community-based groups can apply for funds to memorialise their losses, hopes, courageous acts and personal remembrances. This would encourage citizens to become engaged in the process

of memorialisation at a grassroots level, supported by a national prerogative; thus giving prominence to online spaces for memory, physical spaces or infrastructure development driven locally and non-physical memorialisation processes such as simultaneous yet diverse acts of public expressions of remembrance.

4. **Strengthen the role of religious leaders in community based memorialisation and non-recurrence**

The positive actions of religious leaders, particularly in long-term, sustained interactions with the community - in healing, memorialising and understanding through religious rituals and beliefs, as well as mitigating negative impacts and hate through religious reasoning and beliefs - can have a significant impact on non-recurrence. The use of 'compassion' as a practice that is rooted in Southern culture can be helpful in reconciliation, and peacebuilding. Similarly, forgiveness and understanding, karma, tolerance and mercy can become useful practices through various religious beliefs that can enable memorialisation that is sympathetic, peaceful and not harmful (hateful) to others. As such, the role of religious leaders, through training on transitional justice mechanisms and tools for memorialisation and peacebuilding could enhance their impact on non-recurrence and healing at the community or village levels.

5. **Memorialisation should be crosscutting and linked to other policy and practice areas**

Memorialisation should not merely be a component of transitional justice mechanisms (which by definition is an incremental process), as sites of memory, memorials and spaces for reflection will be permanent and may not reflect the changing nature of memorialisation needs. As such, memorialisation needs to be linked to other policy and practice areas such as culture, religion, social cohesion and reconciliation, education, archaeology, media and communications with crosscutting issues such as gender, psychosocial support, conflict-sensitivity and human rights perspectives considered. Sustained and targeted support in the area of *mental health* needs particular attention when dealing with trauma in the context of memorialisation.

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Radhika Hettiarachchi is a researcher, curator and development practitioner. She is primarily engaged in the field of peacebuilding with an expertise in memorialisation and oral history, as well as the arts as a means of creating space for civil society discourse on issues of gender, security, memory justice and reconciliation. She read English and Communications Theory at York University, Canada, and holds a Masters in Development Management from the London School of Economics and Political Science, U.K.

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About the project –

The Community Memorialisation Project is a joint project of Search for Common Ground and The Herstories Project along with district partners - Viluthu Centre for Human Resource Development in Mannar, Prathiba Media Network in Matara and Women Development Foundation in Ampara.

The project will capture individual and shared community narratives in order to prioritise and strengthen community owned memorialisation. Its primary objective is to facilitate an environment that acknowledges and preserves multiple histories, while encouraging empathy through inter-generational transfer and inter-regional sharing of memory to support peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Building on individual stories the project team will work with the communities to share their stories and facilitate dialogue within their communities about why memorialisation is needed, why multiple narratives should co-exist, and how we remember, at the divisional level and between the participating districts. The process will focus on empathetic listening and acknowledgement.

While the project will have a cathartic and empathetic impact on the participants sharing their life stories at an individual level, it will also facilitate their voices and needs to be heard, through its wide dissemination. The success of the project will be in attitudinal changes – about the need to hear and acknowledge the many personal truths that exist. At a wider level, it will contribute to how Sri Lankans memorialise and historicise our past, and to making processes of justice, truth and reconciliation inclusive.