Article

Nationalistic Authorship and Resistance in Northeastern Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Post-war Sri Lanka is defined by the logic of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, glorification and expansion of the military, and the exponential growth of state-corporate economic projects. This article examines the performative politics of the state in mass ritual discourse and spatial domination while acknowledging the various ways in which elements of the Northeastern Tamil community in Sri Lanka are mobilising as an activist community in the post-war period, including political agitation and emancipatory initiatives that respond to social justice issues, such as land grabs. Offering an analysis premised on the concept of performative politics, this article interrogates the process by which the state defines itself, while the Tamil community has used performative politics to communicate the unacceptability of the post-war performance of power. A framework of performative politics in post-war Sri Lanka, I argue, introduces a new grammar of politics more responsive to the nationalistic Sinhala-Buddhist settler-colonial tendencies of the state and to the polyvalent nature of Tamil resistance. On the international level, the state performatively complies with international demands for accountability and reconciliation while continuing to oppress the Tamil minority and undertake nationalistic authorship of post-war space.

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Introduction: Post-war Northeast Sri Lanka

In May 2009, a long civil war came to an end in Sri Lanka. After nearly 30 years, the separatist militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fell to the state forces. The state declared the victory as the 'second independence' for the island: territorial control of the country's northeast—claimed by the Tamils as their traditional homeland—was restored to the Sri Lankan state. For the majority Sinhalese population, this victory represented both the defeat of 'terrorism' and the re-conquest of land previously withheld from the unitary state structure. Total territorial control is necessitated by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist ideology, in which the collective imagination of nationhood is based on the preservation and protection of the land for Buddhism and Buddhists. The central role of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology—an exclusionary nationalism—in processes of post-war nation-building, I argue, is best examined through the concept of political and spatial performativity.

Since independence from the British in 1948, political expediency has compelled Sinhalese leaders to perform their ideological commitment to Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, progressively contributing to exclusionary, anti-minority positioning and discursive and violent practices of nationalism that continue to reproduce the social field. While these political dynamics escalate post-war, the authorship of public space is a highly visible, symbolic and ideological performance by which Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony is expanded into Tamil-dominated regions: a process designed to suppress and erase Tamil nationalist sentiment.

The end of the war was catastrophic in terms of lives lost and human rights abuses (UN 2011; PPT 2010, 2013). It was a period defined by immense violence and humanitarian failures; credible reports have emerged of war crimes committed by both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE (UN 2011, 2012; LLRC 2011). Tamil civilians caught up in this catastrophic event were brutalised and betrayed by both groups, which publicly claimed to have their best interests at heart. The LTTE used the Tamil civilians as human shields as it implored the Tamil diaspora and the international community to enforce a ceasefire (UN 2011; LLRC 2011;

Harrison 2012: 62–63). The state forces fired shells indiscriminately into the crowds of civilians and militants gathered in ever-shrinking, state-mandated 'safe zones'. A United Nations (UN)-appointed panel of experts asserted that credible information from media, human rights and diaspora groups points to a possible figure of 40,000 civilian deaths (UN 2011). Thousands of people remain missing (IRIN News 2012). Disappearances have been a consistent feature of the conflict.

Post-war, agitation in pursuit of information on missing persons and accountability for mass atrocity crimes has been met with state denial and repression. The Tamil media is consistently under siege by unidentified assailants, thought to be pro-state militia and military intelligence (TAG 2013). Disappearances in the North (and to a lesser extent, country-wide) occur regularly, with one report alleging a frequency of one disappearance every five days (Watchdog 2012a). The territory formerly ruled by the LTTE as a *de facto* state is heavily militarised by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Development is 'securitised' (Goodhand et al. 2002) and the state-corporate-military nexus is both nebulous and established. A number of authors have described the various means by which a 'war by other means' is being waged against the Tamils in the post-war period: a war in which the weapons are socio-economic disempowerment, spatial oppression and militarisation, surveillance, intimidation and cultural intrusion in pursuit of Sinhala-Buddhist homogenisation. These weapons are concealed in the rhetoric of transitional justice, national security and development (Amarasingam and Hyndman 2014; Crisis Group 2012; Fernando 2013; Gowing 2013; Varatharajah 2013). The new features of this 'war' work in tandem with the continuation of colonial and post-colonial state practices of colonisation—the resettlement and 'privileging' of Sinhalese peasants that epitomises the potent nexus between Sinhala Buddhism, the postcolonial state and development practices (Rampton 2009). The hierarchy of power has been reconfigured and reproduced with a militaristic Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism at its peak, reinforced by a new logic of triumph over terrorism.

This article addresses contemporary political struggles in Northeast Sri Lanka by evoking a framework of performative politics. Political roles, Charles Tripp (2013) asserts, are defined and constructed in ways that implicate wider inequalities of agency. By performing a particular role in the political production, individuals reproduce the subject and, in turn, the political order. The circumstances in which a performance can succeed or fail and the techniques of performance in question have implications for the configuration of power and the

ability of those excluded from power to reject their assigned roles. Nationalistic performativity is central to the authorship of a ‘national story’ that underpins the post-war project of nation-building. By recognising nationalism as a tool in the construction of hegemony within the framework of the nation-state, by which political elites retain power, it becomes clear that ‘nationalisms’ must be consistently performed in order to stabilise the political order (Thiranagama 2011). The framework of performative politics is, in turn, also capable of making visible what is suppressed or rendered invisible by the state (Wilmer 2012). Periods of political and social disruption can be a fruitful time to study the workings of power: As the ‘normal’ is being challenged, the conventions of everyday performance break down and fail to hold the audience (Tripp 2013). Individuals can unite to challenge the established architecture of domination through collective and performative practices. In Sri Lanka, various actors seek justice and political rights by performing their resistance to, or subversively appropriating, the traditional systems of administration and justice that have offered only subjugated roles to the Tamil people.

The first section of this article traces the promotion and production of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, while the second section examines the state’s mass ritual discourse and militaristic spectacle since the triumph of the state forces over the LTTE. The third section of this article addresses the process of land authorship and ‘re-conquest’ (Fernando 2013) of the Northeast. This encompasses a highly symbolic Sinhala-Buddhist nationalistic inscription of triumph on the Tamil-dominated land and the dispossession of the Tamil people through legally dubious land grabs (CPA 2013). Turning to the state’s institutionalisation of the ‘national story’, section four analyses the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)—the state’s post-conflict reconciliation mechanism, which issued its final report in 2010—as a state performance instituted in response to international demands: a performative tool of impunity and a method of obfuscating on-going violence against the Tamil minority. The article reflects on how the persistent counter-narrative of the Tamil community—which takes performative forms to influence the international movement for accountability—destabilises the state’s hegemonic project and offers a form of resistance. This resistance has been largely couched in Tamil nationalism, discernible in the political narrative of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), and institutionally established in the election of the TNA-dominated Northern Provincial Council in 2013.

Performing the Nation: Sinhala-Buddhist Mass Ritual Discourse

The post-war period in Sri Lanka, from May 2009 to January 2015, was marked by discourse and performative events designed to consolidate the Rajapaksa government's power. Mahinda Rajapaksa was democratically defeated in presidential elections in January 2014 by Maithripala Sirisena, who defected from Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Freedom Party on a platform of good governance. This article focuses on the Rajapaksa government's post-war effort to generate political capital by authoring the military victory as a continuation of Sinhala-Buddhist mytho-history: the stories and events that are 'remembered' as a shared basis of peoplehood (Khalili 2007: 3). The immediate post-war discourse and mass ritual has longer-term implications, and Sirisena's ideological position is not far removed from his predecessor: Sinhala-Buddhist ideology is written into state discourse (particularly post-war mass ritual celebrations of military triumph), institutional arrangements and the very topography of public and sacred space. The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist project is reliant on the integrity of the territory as a unitary state. The ideology is derived from three beliefs within the group. The Sinhalese believe that they are the only true, original inhabitants on the island; that they were entrusted by Buddha to keep the island as a sacred place for his teachings; and that they are in fact a minority in the region, given that all other ethnic groups have ties in neighbouring countries (DeVotta 2005; Spencer 1990). Since Independence, political expediency has compelled Sinhalese leaders to perform their ideological commitment to Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, gradually heightening an exclusionary, anti-minority politics and generating discursive and violent practices of nationalism that have continuously reproduced the social field. A process of elite-led instrumentalisation of ethnic identity has 'Sinhalised' the character of the state (De Votta 2004; Rampton 2011: 254; Stokke 1998). Stringent competition for political gain within the Sinhalese community and an urge to throw off the remnants of colonialism prompted this process in post-independence Sri Lanka. In response to the post-independence project of majoritarian nation building, the Tamil people's reification of their 'homeland' in the Northeast generated militancy in its defence: 'Tamil resistance turned on the defence of this territorial space, and Sinhala domination on its denial and dismantling' (Nadarajah and Sentas 2013: 74).

The end of the war against the militant separatist LTTE represents the apex of a contemporary and virulent Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism

that Rajapaksa embodies and promotes (Rampton 2011). Rajapaksa's bellicose coalition building on election in 2005 capitalised on Sinhala-Buddhist aspirations. He promised a military victory and delivered; he brought the Sinhalese-Buddhist state into existence. The president was presented with a special honour by the Buddhist *sangha* (order of monks) in recognition of his success in reclaiming the entirety of the island for Sinhala-Buddhists (Fernando 2013). The position of minorities in the national story is increasingly precarious. Post-war, Rajapaksa's political vision merged nation and state, and perpetuated the foundation myth of the Sinhala people: that 'all other groups...are present merely as shadows, not as constitutive elements of a common political culture' (Wickramasinghe 2009: 1046–7). Post-war dynamics demonstrate that Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in its present form—militaristic, triumphant and domineering—finds expression in attacks on minority livelihoods, land rights and physical security.

The official Sri Lankan post-war script promoted the Rajapaksa brothers—the president, Mahinda, and the secretary of defence, Gotabhaya—as war heroes. Having defeated the LTTE, the Rajapaksa's power was bolstered by mass ritual celebrations of victory over 'terrorism', performances of nationalistic triumph and glorification of the armed forces. Rampton (2011: 254) explains Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in terms of hegemonisation, arguing that the 'gradual but incremental hegemonisation of the social' means that the social imaginary of Sri Lankan space as Sinhala-Buddhist is no longer solely the mobilising rhetoric of elites. Sinhala-Buddhist ideology is diffused throughout the state apparatus and social field. The 'mytho-history' of the Buddhist Chronicles the *Mahavamsa* informs Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and has been adopted as the official history of the state. The *Mahavamsa*'s continuity in the present is depicted in state discourse and mass ritual: through cultural and political performances. A regularly recalled episode in reference to the end of the war is the *Mahavamsa*'s account of the battle between the Sinhala King Dutugemunu (who reigned from 161 BC to 137 BC) and the 'invading Tamil' Prince Elara from India's Chola Kingdom. As Neil DeVotta (2007: 10) asserts, because 'the requisite imaginings had been performed centuries before, modern Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists did not need to create a mytho-history when they began calibrating an ideological project to ensure their group's supremacy'.

It fell to the Rajapaksa government to modernise and conclude the ancient battle 'against' 'the Tamils', drawing continuity between this ancient battle between warring kingdoms and the state's defeat of the LTTE in 2009. Popular discourse was saturated with references to the

ancient battle as the state media apparatus offered flattering and strategic comparison between Dutugemunu and Mahinda Rajapaksa: a powerful populist tool (Interviews 2012; Rampton 2011). The echoes of mythology cemented support for the government and ensured majoritarian consent for a military solution to the conflict. Government-issued billboards and pro-government television advertisements where Rajapaksa stood proudly in a formation of ancient Sinhala kings made explicit the connection (Interviews, Fieldwork observation 2012). The defeat of the most recent Tamil threat to the Sinhala-Buddhist nation was framed as the accomplishment of a sacred task: an accomplishment that provided unprecedented political capital to Rajapaksa.

E. Valentine Daniel (1996: 61) argues that politicians use ‘modes of being’ performatively: rituals that ordered moral life in the past are enacted in the service of political capital. The power granted to the Rajapaksa government to pursue a military solution was entirely connected to the popularity of the military and the personal popularity of the brothers. Rampton explains this popularity by developing a concept of hegemony that acknowledges theories of elite instrumentalism of nationalism but also emphasises that Rajapaksa’s ascendancy to power was underpinned by discursive and ideological support. Rajapaksa is ‘*primus inter pares* in the pursuit of a conception of a Sinhalese nation’ (Rampton 2011: 268). He speaks to the hegemonic nationalism in Sinhala society because he is a product of that hegemony. In his politics, he ‘assumed the mantle of nationalist legitimacy’ in faithfulness to Sinhala nationalist rhetoric and militarism at a time when parties adhering to the liberal peace were discredited (Rampton 2011: 264). Rajapaksa’s rule was defined by a resurgent Sinhala nationalist discourse and consolidation of power on that basis. While seeking election in 2005, Mahinda praised Buddhist history, ‘waved flags’, promised to defeat the LTTE militarily, and blamed the West, particularly Norway, for the country’s ‘peace crisis’ (Imtiyaz 2013: 9). With an uncompromising stance on state sovereignty, territorial integrity and the unitary state structure (Chinthana 2005: 31), Rajapaksa presented himself as a man who cherished the country’s traditions and would oversee the reestablishment of Sinhala-Buddhist national identity in a unitary state. The president (until 2015) guaranteed his political security by using Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism as a vehicle for power, capitalising on the great ‘meaningful act’ of finishing the war.

The militaristic political campaign of Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brothers drew on ‘mass ritual discourse’ (Dag Tjaden 2012) to reinvigorate the Sinhala nation’s collective identity and reinforce individual identification with the Sinhala-Buddhist nation. The

performance underway was systemic: a discursive national identity process. The ideological tool available to Rajapaksa in consolidating support for a military solution was the long-desired reclamation of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation. The most overt indication of the militarisation of society—the fact that every Sri Lankan in the south has a family member in the services or an alternate, close connection to the military—was exploited in the military recruitment drive for the final phase of the war. In an advertisement campaign popular enough to be award-winning, Sri Lankan advertising agency Triad endeavoured to 'spark a feeling of belonging and closeness' to the military (Triad 2013)—an institution dominated by Sinhala-Buddhists. Under the slogan *Api Wenuwen Api*, translated as 'We for Ourselves', or 'Be Together for All', the recruitment drive exceeded recruitment targets for the military, the navy and the police force. Written into this campaign, and reinforced by Rajapaksa's emphasis on territorial integrity, was the desire to militarily reclaim Sri Lanka for the Sinhalese. The rest of society was encouraged to contribute to the war effort in other ways. For example, village societies, welfare societies and other groups, often led by the local Buddhist monk, encouraged people to donate blood for the soldiers (Interview, Journalist 2012). Rajapaksa brought together the entire establishment in support for the final military assault: 'the military, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the media, the intelligentsia, the Buddhist monks, the Catholic priests, everyone' (Interview, Academic 2012). The ideology underpinning this coalition was that of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

Post-war Nationalistic Performatives

Nationalistic performatives continued in the post-war period with the added element of militaristic triumph, as Rajapaksa reasserted his historic achievement—defeating the LTTE—in order to sustain popular support. Paul Gilroy (2000: 151–2) argues that there is a continuity between contemporary political culture and the aestheticisation and theatricality of politics of Fascist, totalitarian regimes. Performances of power are characterised by parades, flags, iconography and the branding and marketing of political figures by media specialists. These are political enterprises that both appropriate and influence culture and nationalisms (Guss 2000). The mass ritual discourse formulated by the Rajapaksas (and by the public relations companies involved) was designed to ensure the public embrace of a highly militarised, state-centric national security paradigm (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2009). Thiranagama (2011: 214) asserts that sovereignty—a concept relied upon by the state structure to

legitimise its authority—is not simply a pre-existing, self-evident power. Sovereignty, she suggests, exists as 'potentialities' that must be performed and maintained. This process includes constant delineation between insiders and outsiders, a process controlled by the sovereign in order to consolidate power through ideological coherence. Mass ritual discourse is a means of drawing those boundaries and defining the 'inside'. In Sri Lanka, this is a militaristic Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

For Dag Tjaden (2012: 60), mass parades and public events celebrating the leadership's military capabilities are a display of strength, order and discipline. At such events, the 'national muscle is flexed proudly, and the public cheers in admiration and pride'. Consistent discursive support for the military has a similar effect. Neloufer de Mel's (2007b) book *Militarising Sri Lanka* describes the process by which popular culture in Sri Lanka has been saturated with military signifiers and favourable propaganda about the state military. The display of military strength and 'the general popularity of the forces as a representative of a strong nation' transform 'the image of military potency and popularity' into 'a trait of the nation itself' (Dag Tjaden 2012: 60). The majoritarian make-up of the Sri Lankan forces and the goal of defeating the 'Tamils' and reclaiming the unitary state mean that militaristic rhetoric is inscribed with Sinhala-Buddhist ideology.

The date of the LTTE's defeat is now celebrated annually as 'National Victory Day', a celebration intimately connected to Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. The fourth annual Victory Day in 2013, for example, was marked by a 'grand ceremony' in central Colombo (MOD 2013). Various branches of the state forces marched along Galle Face Green, demonstrating numerical strength, discipline and order. Open-backed trucks towed heavy weaponry and surveillance drones through the streets, showcasing the country's military force and technological advancement. Army helicopters and skydivers dominated the sky; navy boats tore along the seafront. The state forces demonstrated ownership of the land, sea and air, united under the Sri Lankan flag. This annual celebration is also infused with the discourse of triumph over 'terrorism': it is a performative element of the systematic transformation of Tamil political aspirations into 'terrorism'.

Mass rituals are informed by, and performatively reassert and define, the nation's rich tradition and national values, inviting collective cherishment of these ideals (Dag Tjaden 2012). The Rajapaksa brothers knew the value of performativity, as leaders of the nation they both adhered to and transformed Sinhala-Buddhist identity. In public appearances and ceremonies, the Rajapaksas referred to their

Sinhala-Buddhist credentials, their 'war hero' status and reminded the population of the 'meaningful event' that required and gave rise to a restaging of national, Sinhala-Buddhist identity: the end of the war. The 'pride of leadership' (Dag Tjaden 2012) cultivated in Sri Lanka is inseparable from the hegemonic Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist culture and tradition that encompasses 'tradition' in the south of the island, which, in turn, informs the Sinhala-Buddhist supremacy that has strengthened, proliferated and gained institutional approval in the post-war period. Within the hierarchised nation, politically and culturally, minorities can co-exist with Sinhala-Buddhists only if they accept their subordinate position in the hierarchy (Rampton 2011; Imtiyaz 2013).

Mass rituals invite displays of national identity from citizens. The role of the active citizen—the patriot—in immediately post-war Sri Lanka was to support the Rajapaksa government in public demonstrations, protests and national celebrations. The state's staging of nationalistic celebrations such as 'Victory Day' and pro-government protests against international investigations into the end of the war ought to be understood as an invitation to publicly perform solidarity with the Rajapaksa government. The primary purpose of these demonstrations was to provide a public outlet for nationalistic sentiment within the population, on the basis of loyalty to the Rajapaksa government. The demonstrations, in turn, benefitted the Rajapaksas by showcasing the domestic support they enjoyed to an international audience. As Stanley Cohen (2001: 112) argues in *States of Denial*, today's political culture demands that accounts of events are negotiated in spectacle, simulation and stage management. Public and performative spectacles are strategic acts of interpretation and framing, strategised by governments to consolidate power and to deny allegations of wrongdoing. State-backed rallies in 2012 invited the population to signal their rejection of a UN Human Rights Council resolution that called on the Sri Lankan state to do more in terms of post-war reconciliation and institutional reform (Daily News 2012). Former President Rajapaksa's strategy was 'to cajole and frighten his Sinhala-base into backing him unconditionally', by referring to 'prosperous futures or terrifying enemies' (Gunesekara 2012). The physical show of people at protests was intended to deflect the imposition of any formal accountability or transitional justice mechanisms by the United Nations. The physical presence of participants was presented by the state as evidence of national support: a display of physicality more persuasive than abstract assertions and legal practices. This mass ritual performance, though ineffective in preventing the passing of the resolution, had the benefit of increasing nationalistic

fervour. Drawing on discourses of war heroism, national sovereignty and the image of a small country under siege, the protests were inherently infused with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and patriotism in the service of the Rajapaksas. The discourse of 'terrorists' and enemies of the state remains useful to delegitimise international calls for accountability for war crimes committed by the state forces: 'interference' by the United Nations Human Rights Council was framed for the Rajapaksas' domestic audience as a service purchased by the pro-LTTE Tamil diaspora. The Rajapaksa government further fractured ethnic relations in Sri Lanka through the constant evocation of national security threats, performances of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and entrenched militarisation.

Inscribing the Land: Performing Domination

To examine the topography and architecture of domination and oppression in the post-war Northeast is to realise that space is produced yet agentive (Jazeel and Brun 2009: 2). The authorship of space is examined here as part of the state's post-war nation-building strategy, a continuation of an historical process of Sinhala-Buddhist revival under colonialism and post-independence. Space is meaningful; a politics of identity and power, of ethnicity and culture is enacted through space. It is permeated by politics and history and (re)produced through everyday negotiations and social encounters. To examine spatial practices and politics is to examine 'the very fabric through which nationhood, identity and violence are produced' (Jazeel and Brun 2009: 2). The process of spatial authorship began with renewed vigour in Tamil areas post-war, as the military victory of the Sri Lankan state forces and the rise of a powerful anti-minority Sinhala-Buddhist rhetoric combined to legitimise and necessitate the physical, social and cultural domination of the Northeastern provinces. A spatial analysis is not merely an ideological exercise. Space, as Jacobs (1996: 5) states, is part of geometry of power and signification in which the material and ideological are co-constitutive. The end of the war has enabled the latest stage of a settler-colonialism project that has oscillated between policies of subjugation, practices of terror and acts of extraordinary violence in order to produce a docile and pacified Tamil population.

The post-war period has seen the expansion of symbols of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist hegemony into Tamil-dominated areas as vehicles of ideology, material bases for neoliberal economic projects in the region and permanent, entrenched militarisation. The post-war 'Sinhalisation' of the Northeast has included military and unofficial civilian settlements,

neoliberal development and the construction of Buddhist religious structures, to cater to the Sinhalese military personnel, Sinhalese tourists and Buddhist pilgrims (Adnan 2014). The process serves to physically inscribe the triumph of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism on the landscape while the physical remnants of the LTTE's brand of Tamil nationalism are erased. Recognising that cultural symbolic tools are available to the state to enhance its power and authority (Davies 1994: 90), Sri Lanka's victorious Rajapaksa government immediately began to establish permanent symbols on the conquered land, symbols that serve to embed and promote Sinhala-Buddhist identity. Sinhala-Buddhist nation-building necessitates the (re)colonisation of Tamil land as part of the unitary state. The colonial ordering of Sri Lanka's territory under the British transformed the island from relatively autonomous spatio-political units to a territorial colonial island and, post independence, to an independent nation-state within which the Tamils were reduced to a minority (Jazeel and Brun 2009). Tamil nationalists have rejected the naturalisation of this political unit, declaring the right to a separate state on the basis of their pre-colonial autonomy and ethnic nationhood. The Tamil people have long conceptualised the struggle for self-determination as a response to Sinhalese colonisation and oppression.

The term 'Sinhalisation' encompasses occupation by the overwhelmingly Sinhalese army, demographic change by settling Sinhalese families in the North, re-naming roads and areas in the Sinhalese language and building Buddhist stupas in traditionally Hindu or Christian areas—physical landmarks that support the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist project (Interviews 2012, 2013; Majeed 2012). Road names and signposts in the Northeast have been erected in the Sinhalese script rather than in Tamil or English. The naming of roads is also merged with Sinhala-Buddhist military triumphalism: In Kaṉakārayaṉkuḷam, for example, two roads have been named after soldiers who took part in the war, and another is named after a Buddhist monk (Fernando 2013). Sinhalisation, in short, is the production of a post-independence national identity, marked ethnically as Sinhalese and religiously as Buddhist. The process naturalises the Sinhala-Buddhist character of space, and minoritises Tamil, Muslim and non-Sinhala difference. As elegantly asserted by Tariq Jazeel (2013), the process simultaneously naturalises and ethnicises the fabric of the nation in contemporary Sri Lanka. Military renovations of neglected Buddhist monasteries have sometimes been followed by Sinhala settlements, showcasing the link between the military, Buddhism and colonisation (Fernando 2013). The site of the final stage of the war, the site of mass atrocities perpetrated against the Tamil community, has

been transformed into a place of inseparable triumphalism and religious devotion by the construction of a military monument and a Buddhist stupa (Fernando 2013: 225).

The post-war economic system in the Northeast is ethnocratic. The system facilitates ethnic control of power and resources, constituting a process by which the Tamil minority is oppressed and dispossessed by 'the tyranny of the majority' (Yiftachel 2014). As noted by Woost and Winslow (2004: 203–4), development can 'open up new spaces for violence and political manipulation as new resources become the object of desire up and down the hierarchy of agency'. The 'post-war reconstruction' propagated by the state has excluded thousands of displaced Tamil families from new housing and construction projects and deprived them of their land through a legally dubious process of land acquisition (Fernando 2013; CPA 2012). The creation of 'High Security Zones' and 'Economic Development Zones' that block access to land and sea, and the military's involvement in economic life undermine crucial forms of livelihood and food security (Adnan 2014; CPA 2013; MRG 2010: 14; Yiftachel 2014). Fernando (2013) argues that state professions of secular and equitable development are intended to veil the return of colonisation, as state land acquisition deliberately targets and dispossesses the Tamil and Muslim communities. In contrast, the military, Sinhalese business people from the south and international capital have attained control of the resources of the Northern Province. The 'post-war' expansion of Sinhala-Buddhist state projects into the Tamil region is intrinsically interwoven with trade and commerce. As Fernando (2013) describes, key public and economic locations have been occupied. Under the 'gloss and spin' of the current development strategy, in practice we are seeing a return to the militarised, highly nationalistic and exclusifying colonisation of old (Rampton 2009). The state's pursuit of development bears all the hallmarks of an intentional long-term strategy of colonisation.

The Tamils believe that successive governments have planned to change the ethnic composition of those areas, in order to undermine Tamil separatist claims and minimise Tamil parliamentary representation (Interviews 2012; Lindberg and Orjuela 2011). Land alienation policies under the Land Acquisition Act contribute to ethnic and religious repression; the meaning of the territory is altered and minority communities are politically and materially marginalised. The logic of national security, normalised militarisation and Sinhalese settlement is redesigning the local landscape and depriving the people of their land.

While LTTE graveyards and monuments with ideological functions were destroyed post-war, certain parts of the LTTE infrastructure have become a hive of tourist activity. The selective destruction, construction, showcasing and appropriation of physical sites is revealing in terms of the state's selective remembering and consolidation of a favourable conflict narrative. State soldiers guide predominantly Sinhala visitors on an unofficial 'terrorism tour' and offer a state-sanctioned narrative of events (Wijedasa 2012; Prabhagaran 2014). In post-conflict and post-atrocity settings, governing powers often draw on museum spaces and 'historical' tours as zones of evidence and authoritative explanation, seeking to enhance both popular national unity and international sympathy and material assistance (Hughes 2009). Daniel (1996: 62) contends that the 'theatrics' performed at historical sites are enhanced by the demands of tourism. The state-military authorship of LTTE sites promotes the contemporary narrative of Sinhala supremacy, predestined territorial integrity and the defeat of 'terrorists'. The military tours are designed to legitimise and glorify the actions of the state forces, and promote the popularity of the military in order to naturalise militarisation. The state's selective remembering of the LTTE—composed and delivered through tourist sites—fuels a triumphalist Sinhala nationalism, reproduces the LTTE as a viable future threat and, as a result, 'provides grounds for ongoing militarization of civilian spaces by the state and marginalization of Tamils and other minority groups in the country who are represented as latent threats' (Amarasingam and Hyndman 2014: 561). The Tamils and all minorities are presented in discourse as inhabiting Sri Lanka at the sufferance of the Sinhalese. Minority property and lives are offered no protection from attack and the Sinhala-Buddhist state's seizure and destruction of the land and property of minorities contributes to ethnic and religious repression. The meaning of the territory is being altered in a performance of identity and power, of ethnicity and culture, enacted through space.

Religious and community groups, lawyers and politicians in the Northern Tamil community are mobilising an activist community in response to this process of dispossession. Initial evidence of a new performative politics includes public protests contesting land grabs and the performance of resistance through highly publicised legal measures and community emancipation initiatives. Regular protests (documented in text and images by the TamilNet news site) have been held contesting land grabs, organised primarily by the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), though state violence is an ever-present threat at these events and 'unidentified assailants' assumed to be military intelligence have

attacked protestors (Balasundaran 2014). Protests have been organised and attended in the Northeast by political parties such as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the TNPF, the Democratic People's Front (DPF) and the United Socialist Party (USP). Opposing land grabs has been a means of achieving cross-party unity and the organisers of protests have urged the masses to take part in further protests, including a protest organised by the TNA in Valikaamam to demand the demilitarisation of so-called High Security Zones (TamilNet 2012). Protests have been a popular response to prospective land seizures, as the population has mobilised against what TamilNet (2014a) terms a 'genocidal land grab by the occupying Sinhala military'. In January 2014, protestors took to the streets in the coastal Tamil Catholic parish of Peasaalai, when the Sri Lankan Navy brought land surveyors to measure land on which the 600-year-old church in the village is situated. The people of the village prevented the surveyors from measuring the land despite the deployment of intimidation by the Navy, including recording the protest on video cameras and harassing the protestors (TamilNet 2014a). In August 2014, villagers from three Muslim villages in Trincomalee in the Eastern province similarly disrupted state attempts to survey land. The state attempted the survey as part of plans to construct a Buddhist *vihara* in the area, plans that would involve the seizure of land from local Muslims. The attempted survey was, again, overseen by security services, this time the Sri Lankan police (TamilNet 2014b).

These public mobilisations against land grabs have revitalised civil protest in the Northeast and offered real resistance by physically blocking the state's assessment of land and indicating that Sinhala-Buddhist authorship and militarisation cannot continue unchecked in the Northeastern provinces. This sporadic mass resistance is underpinned by emerging forms of institutional organisation. The newly established 'Mannar citizens committee' is presented as a coordinating body of resistance in the North, outside of standard political formations, while the formidable electoral success of the TNA in the 2013 Provincial Council elections (discussed in Section 4) demonstrates the Tamil's ability to utilise state institutions as a platform to assert and consolidate agency. Further, rights groups have filed cases in court to contest the military occupation of land (WAN 2013; CPA 2013). A Jaffna-based lawyer and activist, Guruparan Kumaravadivel, speaking at a press conference in Jaffna in May 2013, said that a writ-application had been filed by the TNA and lawyers on behalf of 'around 1474' petitioners, requesting that the Court of Appeal halt the government's attempt to legally acquire their lands under the Land Acquisition Act (Guruparan quoted in

Tamilnet 2013). The negotiation of these various mechanisms demonstrates the ability of those excluded from power to reject their assigned roles in the post-conflict script.

Local activists further describe their strategies of resistance as internationalisation of the issue through conferences, such as a 2014 conference in London hosted by the British Tamil Forum (BTF and APPGT 2014), and engagement with the UN, including lobbying and submitting information (Interviews 2014). Local Tamil groups have been mobilised alongside and in support of the human rights and Tamil diaspora groups who lobby internationally for accountability for war crimes and disappearances. Led by human rights groups and civil society leaders, protests focus on the state's responsibility to account for the missing, and are designed for international consumption. For example, protests were organised during the media frenzy of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2013 (Channel 4 News 2013). The Tamil activist community, by performing resistance to the passive roles of 'victims of war' and 'beneficiaries of post-war development' assigned to them, has the potential to invigorate wider involvement in agitation for political rights. Rejecting the violence of occupation, the Tamil community has used performative politics to communicate the unacceptability of the government's post-war performance of power.

Post-conflict Reconciliation Mechanisms: Performing Liberal Transition

Transitional justice is a highly politicised process, and 'the forms of transitional justice developed speak practically and symbolically to precisely what kind of transition (if any) is actually occurring' (McEvoy and McGregor 2008: 7). A post-war analysis of the unchecked rise of a triumphant Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and antagonistic processes of 'Sinhalisation' in the nascent Tamil Eelam demonstrates Sri Lanka's rejection of liberal conceptions of peace-building and reconciliation, and reveals the state's post-conflict actions and rhetoric in this regard as strategic performances, designed to avoid accountability and international censure. While Thiranagama (2013: 102) notes that 'the state has to continually perform itself as such through spectacles and languages of stateness', 'transitioning states' also have to perform themselves as such by appearing to adhere to the framework of liberal transition. The transitional justice paradigm 'has come to dominate debates on the intersection between democratization, human rights protections, and state-reconstruction after conflict' (McEvoy 2007: 412). A transitional

justice 'template' or 'toolbox' has emerged, from which government officials and non-governmental advocates can consider which measures will promote 'justice, peace, and reconciliation' in the specific transitional environment. The International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ, 2009) lays out these measures as 'prosecuting individual perpetrators; offering reparations to victims of state-sponsored violence; establishing truth-seeking initiatives about past abuse; reforming institutions like the police and the courts and removing human rights abusers from positions of power'. Transitional justice has emerged from its historically exceptionalist origins to become something which is normal, institutionalised and mainstreamed (McEvoy 2007). Critics argue that transitional justice is global project aimed at reconstructing Third World states in Western liberal democratic terms (Lundy and McGovern 2008). The 'liberal peace' brings together development and poverty reduction objectives and security policies designed by international organisations, donor countries and the UN. Duffield (2001) critiques these arrangements as an attempt by the powerful to contain, stabilise and ameliorate the effects of violent conflict in the Third World.

Sri Lankan progress in achieving 'transition' is propagated by the state at great expense.[2] Though signalling compliance with the increasingly standardised 'toolbox' of transitional justice (ICTJ 2011), the state uses select processes and its lexicon to deflect accountability claims and conceal on-going violence. As Höglund and Orjuela (2013) assert, the assumption that 'transition' has occurred in Sri Lanka—which underpins state mechanisms of reconciliation—suggests that 'transition' from war to peace involved the righting of political injustices, namely the existence of 'terrorism', though the end of the war did not mark a transition 'from a militarised society to a non-militarised society' nor 'from an undemocratic to a democratic society' (Höglund and Orjuela 2013: 307). This discourse obscures continuities of violence. Post-war, human rights reports continue to document atrocities and human rights abuses perpetrated by the state authorities, primarily against the Tamil community, suggesting a continuing logic of ethnic persecution (HRW 2013; Sri Lanka Campaign 2014). A Freedom from Torture (FFT, 2015) report emphasises that the electoral defeat of the Rajapaksa

[2] For example, the Thompson Advisory Group, a Washington-based advocacy and strategy group, was hired by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka to make a documentary named 'Sri Lanka: Reconciling and Rebuilding' as part of a contract that costs the state-run institution $ 66,600 (Rs 8,337,600) per month as part of Sri Lanka's international diplomatic campaign coming up to Geneva 2014, and to influence US policy-makers and politicians (Bastians 2014).

government has not put an end to torture in custody. Under Maithripala Sirisena's government since January 2015, the UK-based medical and psychological care organisation has continued to receive referrals for tortured Sri Lankans and argues that 'one of the most urgent tasks facing the country's new leadership will be to eradicate torture by the military and police', stating that the illegal practice is 'deeply entrenched' in the security apparatus (FFT 2015).

The state's decisive military victory means that it is the author of justice and reconciliation initiatives. The choices made about the narratives of a reconciliation process, as well as its parameters, Schubert (2013: 4) reminds us, are political choices: the 'political imperatives of establishing, legitimising and stabilising control over a post-war nation-state' are the foremost concern for governments in power. The Sri Lankan state's primary transitional justice mechanism was the LLRC, initially established in reaction to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's appointment of a UN Panel to investigate issues of accountability for reported humanitarian law violations at the end of the war. The LLRC was propagated as the sovereign state's fulfilment of a satisfactory investigation into the end of the war, thereby rendering the 'vehemently unwelcome' international initiatives obsolete and intrusive (Anonymous 2011: 40; Thiranagama 2013). Rather than 'enable Sri Lanka to unpack dominant "truths", track command responsibility and redress legacies of abuse', the LLRC has instead, as Nesiah (2009) feared, served to 'prop-up national myths, cover up the responsibility of those in power and legitimize a repressive regime'. Sri Lanka has repeatedly shown how commissions of inquiry can be manipulated into performances of justice-seeking that are, in practice, instruments of suppressing dissent (Nesiah 2009; AI 2009). By channelling criticisms of human rights violations into toothless institutions, the state relies on procedures of inquiry to avoid actual accountability and reinforce impunity. The state regularly suppresses the outcomes of these commissions, and prosecutions for human rights violations and institutional reform are not forthcoming (CPA 2014), thereby betraying the justice aspirations of participants (Nesiah 2009).

The LLRC's mandate provided for interrogation of the past in order to draw lessons for the future, including institutional and administrative reform. The LLRC was instructed to provide a framework for the promotion of national unity and reconciliation of all communities; a 'methodology' for restitution to the war-affected and any other recommendations accommodated within its framework (LLRC 2011: 1.5). The LLRC report pleasantly surprised commentators, offering progressive

recommendations on political dialogue and devolution, reform of the public service and education system, land disputes, demilitarisation and strategies for conflict memorialisation. Crucially, however, the LLRC's mandate implicitly relied on a framework of assessing state 'failure to protect its citizens from [LTTE] terrorism', rather than examining state accountability for violence and atrocity (Thiranagama 2012: 99). The process avoided apportioning any accountability whatsoever to the Rajapaksa government for the escalation of the conflict and violations of international law. The LLRC's conception of reconciliation is based on the achievement of a national 'oneness' and 'common identity' (LLRC 2011: 8.217). This conception is consistent with both the 'Sinhalisation' of the country's institutions and an on-going centralisation of power that implies a state-building project based on Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist hegemony (Gowing 2013; Höglund and Orjuela 2013). The very language of reconciliation is imbued with a nationalist tendency to suppress minority interests. The absence of practical implementation of the LLRC's measures, teamed with majoritarian chauvinism, violence against minorities and a recalcitrant position on accountability, confirms Thiranagama's (2013) interpretation of the LLRC as a state performance, where no meaningful regime transition has occurred. The process was a spectacle, she argues, to resymbolise and restage the state's capacity to endure and reform. The LLRC was instituted to reinvest the state with legitimacy and to whitewash state conduct on the issue of accountability for mass atrocity crimes (Thiranagama 2013).

Gowing (2013: 17) argues that the state's 'ostensible commitment to transitional justice' follows a 'performative logic', in line with Thiranagama's reading of the LLRC as a response to international pressure. An anonymous author asserts that the LLRC was instituted 'in anticipation of the UN's move' to establish the UN's Panel of Experts inquiry (Anonymous 2011: 32). Transitional justice mechanisms such as the LLRC, Thiranagama (2013: 94) argues, should be analysed as a 'state performance in the midst of a deep and ongoing violence rather than as a process to bring about reconciliation'. Timed in anticipation of the 2012 United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution on Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Army's establishment of a panel of inquiry to investigate human rights abuses—a self-investigation—is another mechanism formed solely for its performative function; the few public findings of the mechanism served to absolve the state forces of any wrongdoing. In August 2013, 'just ahead of the visit of the High Commissioner Navi Pillay', a new 'Presidential Commission to Investigate into Complaints on Missing Persons' was publicised (CPA 2014). As Gowing (2013: 17)

acknowledges, the precise effect of international pressure is difficult to quantify, but the timing of these various initiatives suggests that it is ‘an important factor in incentivising Sri Lankan elites to pursue such measures’. By appropriating of the language of transition and establishing performative reconciliation mechanisms, Sri Lanka attempts to deflect international calls for accountability.

In terms of the mechanisms themselves, the literature on transitional justice often suggests that the performance of justice for victims—for example, the launching of an investigation or commission, the inclusion of a victim in a criminal trial or providing an institutional forum for those affected by atrocity to tell their stories—is an affirmative and inclusive act that promotes reconciliation (Minow 1999). Osiel (1997) understands criminal trials in transitional justice contexts as a ritualistic performance by which national memories can be consolidated and inscribed. Allowing victims a voice in trials, despite the adversarial nature of such a forum, is thought to symbolically invite victims inside the process of justice (Skaar, Gloppen and Suhrke 2005). Political restraints often dictate the choice to establish truth commissions instead of criminal prosecutions: a ‘middle path between doing nothing and embarking on politically-charged prosecutions’ in transitional justice contexts (McGinn 2000: 163). Sri Lanka’s LLRC cannot be compared to processes elsewhere, such as the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The purpose was not to provide a national form of catharsis to victims of the conflict in line with the TRC’s slogan of ‘revealing is healing’ (Hamber 2009: 65). The mandate and timeframe granted to the LLRC could not support an endeavour of this kind. It was primarily a forum for Colombo-based elites to postulate on the causes of the conflict and offer suggestions for reform. The commission’s ‘field visits’ were in the spirit of outreach, acknowledgment and symbolic inclusion, rather than providing a forum for ascertaining or discussing the ‘truth’ (LLRC 2011: 1.15). Institutionalised transitional justice measures are generally established where ‘transition’ has occurred, from authoritarianism to democracy or from conflict to ‘peace’. In Sri Lanka, Neloufer de Mel (2013: 1) notes, the LLRC participants were not motivated by a desire to bear public witness to atrocity in the interests of recording experiences, asserting dignity and celebrating the exceptionality of survival, in line with the typically expected benefits of post-atrocity truth commissions (Hayner 2001; Agamben 2002). Participation was, in fact, a *risk* taken, in a repressive environment of militarisation and enforced silences, seeking very specific outcomes: direct communication with the state and information on the missing. Its participants—particularly Tamil

women—transformed the LLRC into a space of resistance (de Mel 2012; Thiranagama 2013).

The women who publicly attested to their losses at the LLRC did so in the spirit of pragmatism: 'as their best chance of getting their detained loved ones back' (de Mel 2012: 11). For these women, the LLRC was a forum by which they would be recognised as victims of war with stories to tell. It was also a place to present themselves to the state as 'victim-survivors', deserving of information and compensation (de Mel 2013; Thiranagama 2013). The LLRC 'stage' of performance was requisitioned by the Tamil minority as a platform of communication with the state. Other Tamil grievances were articulated as economic development of the Tamil 'homeland', ownership and military or state seizure of land, non-implementation of language policy and issues around resettlement, 'rehabilitation' and psychosocial services. The submissions brought to the fore the actual nature of the required reconciliation in Sri Lanka: to mend the relationship between the state and the Tamil minority (Thiranagama 2013). The willingness to partake in this theatre of fact-finding speaks to the pragmatism required of the victim-survivors of the war, who prioritised their claim for information over any other form of justice. The women who submitted their grievances to the LLRC live in a place of devastation and militarisation. The commission was their only stage for action and this reality compelled their participation. Women appropriated the LLRC, ensuring that it became a vehicle of memory and a stage to perform their agency (Thiranagama 2013). The Commission, in terms of enforcing justice, however, held out a promise that 'it could not possibly keep' (de Mel 2013: 16).

In terms of seeking accountability for war crimes committed by the state forces at the end of the war, performatives in the international sphere have raised awareness of the Tamil struggle. The 'internationalisation' of the conflict began in the early 1980s, as tens of thousands of Tamils fled violence and persecution, creating a vocal population in exile. Collective power emerging between local and international activists has seen Tamil representatives argue for the Tamil right to self-determination within the organs of the United Nations. Political and civil society actors are aware of their international audience and perform appropriately in pursuit of their respective agendas. The 'Sri Lanka's Killing Fields' documentaries produced by Channel 4 News (2011), for example, were screened at side panel events at the UN Human Rights Council in 2011 and 2013, in order to influence diplomats voting 'against' Sri Lanka (Jeyaraj 2011; Reuters 2013). The Sri Lankan ambassador argued in 2013 that the provision of a platform for this film before the vote was 'part of a cynical, concerted

and orchestrated campaign that is strategically driven and aimed at influencing debate in the council on Sri Lanka' (Aryasinha quoted in Reuters 2013). The performative and staged presentation of this material does not undermine its credibility. The capability to produce propaganda and control information flows is more sustainable for states. They are globally competitive in terms of information technology (Dillon and Reid 2001: 64). Activists and those without the benefits of money and power rely on performative strategies: visual media is a lobbying tool for maximum emotive effect, aimed at the international community.

In January 2014, the Northern Provincial Council (NPC)—the establishment of which was perceived as a positive move towards a Tamil retrieval of political agency and power—passed a resolution calling for an international investigation into war crimes (The Hindu, 2014). This was a performance of political agency by the TNA-dominated institution, despite the restrictions on the NPC's limited powers in a highly militarised and politically centralised state structure. The powers of the NPC are enormously restricted by central government and by the presence of a Governor—a state representative who attempts to control the NPC. The replacement of Major General G.A. Chandrasiri (the military Governor) with H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, a prominent Sri Lankan diplomat and civil servant, is one of several progressive steps made by the new president, steps that have met with cautious and sceptical praise. Though expected to be a toothless governing body, the NPC has become a powerful tool of advocacy and has contributed to the reconfiguration of Tamil resistance and political agency on the international stage. The NPC has granted the TNA a legitimate constituency and a measure of protection in voicing, discussing and collectively confirming Tamil aspirations. Fear of retaliation previously restrained the TNA from vociferously demanding accountability (Butenis 2010). The NPC resolution on accountability was timed to precede and inform the March 2014 UN Geneva Human Rights Council meeting, in fitting with the advocacy strategy adopted by international media and human rights groups in previous years.

The Provincial Council elections themselves proved to be a theatre of collective power, where the Tamil people communicated to the state their prioritisation of political rights over promises of economic improvement and quality of life. The issues addressed in the TNA election manifesto in 2013 followed strong nationalist lines. The TNA reasserted the Tamil right to self-determination and emphasised the prerogatives of demilitarisation, expeditious resettlement of displaced person and receiving information on the missing and disappeared. Ananthi Sasitharan, the widow of an LTTE cadre who disappeared in

the final days of war, was recruited by the TNA to contest the election (Jeyaraj 2014). She sought the support of war widows and former LTTE cadres and was elected on the basis of her promise to combat violence against women and children. A symbol of resistance, challenging the government's narrative of the events at the end of the war, Ananthi's election to the NPC can be viewed as the manifestation of a desire for accountability and a relocation of activism within the apparatus of state. With the overwhelming success of TNA candidates at the NPC elections, and the establishment of this Tamil-dominated administrative body, the spectrum of 'realizable justice' has expanded (de Mel 2012). The call for an international investigation represents growing confidence in the prospect of real justice and political agency for the Tamil population, one that perpetuates the narrative of Tamil victimisation by the state in the service of its own empowerment. A struggle for power between the central government and the Northeastern provinces is beginning, a process which will again bring performances of nationalism—both Tamil and Sinhala-Buddhist - to the core of the island's politics.

Conclusion

The current political landscape in Sri Lanka is best understood through a framework of performance. Performativity in different forms has been examined throughout this article—nationalistic and cultural performativity in the service of Sinhala-Buddhist nation-building; the performance of domination through spatial reordering and authorship in the Northeast; the state's performance of obedience to the norms of 'transition' dictated by the global liberal order (while functioning as a mechanism of denial and absolving the state forces of responsibility for atrocity) and performative acts of resistance to ongoing oppression and injustice by the Tamil minority, staged in various public, activist and institutional forums. While the state performs compliance with the demands emanating from the international institutions of justice, it simultaneously champions majoritarian nationalistic conceptions of Sri Lankan identity that are antithetical to liberal conceptions of reconciliation and post-conflict recovery.

Imposing the dominant narrative of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and triumph over terrorism, the state attempts to erase Tamil history and to denigrate and depoliticise the Tamil nationalist movement. This process amounts to 'denial of the memory of resistance' which is consistent with the encroachment of Sinhalese settlements and military

encampments into the Tamil homeland. The process of colonisation and dispossession, where public and private land has been seized in the process of consolidating the 'unitary state', is supported by post-war rhetoric of 'oneness' that suppresses minority interests and demands assimilation and deference to the Sinhala-Buddhist state. This article has demonstrated how processes of mass ritual have generated and normalised militaristic and triumphant conceptions of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that inform conflict remembrance and the state-directed process of 'reconciliation'. In response, activists have relied on sporadic and increasingly organised and collaborative performances of resistance to contest oppression, violence and the failure of the state to provide information on missing persons. These performatives are local, international and institutional. The Tamil population are using every available avenue to seek justice, relying on media visibility and international and local institutions of power as leverage against an overbearing state.

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