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2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8
Sri Lanka
E-mail: admin@ices.lk
URL: <http://ices.lk/>

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Gross Violations of Human Rights	GVHR
Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission	LLRC
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	LTTE
Mahinda Chintanaya 2010	MC2010
(Mahinda Rajapaksa's) Speech to Parliament -19 May 2009	STP
Tamil National Alliance	TNA
Truth and Reconciliation Commission	TRC
United People's Freedom Alliance	UPFA
United National Party	UNP

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Victorious Victims: An Analysis of Sri Lanka's Post-War Reconciliation Discourse

We could not pretend it did not happen

Desmond Tutu¹ (1998, 1)

Following the end of the war in Sri Lanka in May 2009, much attention has been paid both locally and internationally to the issue of reconciliation and the development of a post-war identity (or identities) in the country. Following the establishment of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in 2010, much of the emphasis in these discussions has focused on the role, approach and findings of the LLRC. However, in spite of the many progressive recommendations made by the LLRC, many actors have stressed the slow progress of the Sri Lankan government towards reconciling a deeply divided polity.² Much of these discussions appear to centre on the question as to why Sri Lanka is moving so slowly towards achieving meaningful reconciliation after such a protracted conflict. In seeking to find answers to this dilemma, the paper turns away from the LLRC and seeks to analyse the President's discourse soon after the war ended in order to analyse his understanding of reconciliation. This is done with a view to understanding the priorities and concerns that are shaping his and by extension the Sri Lankan State's progress towards reconciliation. In order to do this I seek to explore the ways in which three identities — victim, perpetrator and victor — are constructed and the implications the intersections of these constructions have for reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Victims and Perpetrators

The end of a war brings with it the need to address a multitude of pressing issues including the reconstruction of property damaged by war, the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former cadres and economic development. Equally important is the question of coming to terms with a violent and conflicting past (including but not limited to the question of accountability for grave violations of human rights) and reconciliation processes have been a crucial issue of focus in these discussions (Hayner 2001, Bloomfield, Barnes & Huyse 2003).³ In effect, the role of a post-conflict reconciliation process (including but not

¹ "Foreword" to Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (1998).

² These actors range from the Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Tamil National Alliance, Garment exporters and members of the international community including the USA.

³ This paper is based on the understanding that an analysis of reconciliation processes should not be limited to understanding the working of a particular commission (though they may be useful and instructive) but rather should be understood as the larger social environment and ethos in which a society transitions from war to peace. I am heavily influenced by Hamber and Kelly's definition of reconciliation as "the *process* of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships" (A Working Definition of Reconciliation, 2004) However, as Van Der Merwe (1999) points out the issue with understanding reconciliation as a process rather than as an outcome is the difficulty in drawing a dividing line between the pre-reconciliation and reconciliation processes. In order to circumvent this he suggests that reconciliation be defined as a process that encompasses "all initiatives which bring together, or engage, both sides in a pursuit of changing identity, values regarding interaction, attitudes, and patterns of interaction that move them to a more cooperative relationship." (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Community Reconciliation: An Analysis of Competing Strategies and Conceptualizations, 47).

limited to a Commission) is to determine a way of speaking about the past — a past that can and does have multiple interpretations and modes of speaking (Bloomfield, Barnes & Huyse 2003: 40).

In seeking to determine the way in which a conflicting past can be narrated and recorded, it is critical to establish a dichotomy between victim and perpetrator. In some instances this desire has led to explicit definitions of victims and perpetrators by law.⁴ The development of a clear cut differentiation between victims and perpetrators is important because the representation of the victim helps the reader/viewer/consumer make sense of conflict especially viz. its moral dimensions (i.e. who are the good guys and the bad guys). It also shapes the recognition of actors within the conflict and therefore the external (and I would add internal) responses to the conflict. These responses in turn directly impinge on the country's/region's progress towards long-term, stable peace (Bouris 2007: 4).

Although at first glance, the classification of different actors into the roles of either victim or perpetrator and the language used to achieve this can appear to be straight forward, in practice it proves to be a difficult and complex process which entails a number of decisions regarding the scope, time frame, nature of violent incident/violation of human right and therefore the penalties for those found guilty of perpetrating these actions on others.⁵ Furthermore, the growth in conflict-related literature has endowed us with a greater understanding of the complexities and ambiguities that underpin armed conflict which in turn has made the simple classification of one group as victim and another group as perpetrator far more challenging and at times, contentious.⁶

Consequently, the discursive struggles to establish and legitimise victimhood now play an important role in post-war reconciliation processes. In any binary opposition there is always a privileging of one aspect of the binary over the other. In the context of reconciliation processes, it would seem that the identity of the victim is consciously privileged over that of the perpetrator.⁷ The classification of groups into victims and perpetrators is an important development in establishing legitimacy and control over the reconciliation process. This is because, as Torpey points out:

⁴ For example see the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995 of South Africa <<http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/1995-034.pdf>> and Organic Law N° 40/2000 of 26/01/2001 Setting Up Gacaca Jurisdictions and Organizing Prosecutions for Offences Constituting The Crime Of Genocide Or Crimes Against Humanity Committed Between October 1, 1990 and December 31, 1994 of Rwanda: <http://www.geneva-academy.ch/RULAC/pdf_state/2000-Gacaca-Courts-Law-40-2000-of-26Oct2001.pdf>

⁵ The fact that there are many types of political interests and ideologies at play in any reconciliation process is not a new contention and has been recognised elsewhere (Last 2000; Hayner 2001 and Wilson 2001).

⁶ For example see Verdoolaege's discourse analysis of testimonies made to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission by individuals who had had their human rights violated but had then gone on to commit violations of human rights. (Verdoolaege 2008) and Mamdani's analysis of the genocidaires in Rwanda some of whom joined in the violence even though they were neither part of the government nor the militias (Mamdani 2001: 8).

⁷ For example see Linfield 's discussion on victim-perpetrator identities in post-genocide Rwanda (Linfield 2010).

[the victim of criminal activity] can be seen as having experienced an irrational, unsystematic, pointless kind of suffering; the victim of political violence, in contrast, can be thought of as having suffered the wilful mistreatment of the greedy and the power-mad. Accordingly he or she can be seen as especially deserving of attention and even as having a whiff of the saintly for having survived this egregious maltreatment. (2005: 42)

One of the major reasons for this is the underlying belief that any reconciliation process should benefit those who have been victimised and at the same time hold those who have been responsible for this victimisation accountable for their actions (Hayner 2001: 14). Due to this it is those who are identified (or identify themselves) as victims who are able to claim the moral high ground over those who are identified as perpetrators.

In fact I would argue that the establishment of these parameters is the first step towards setting up a reconciliation process. Borer comments on the impact of this differentiation in her discussion on the characteristics of the human rights discourse on victim and perpetrator:

- 1) Most often they are referred to as two distinct groups: in a situation of Gross Violations of Human Rights (GVHR), you have victims and you have perpetrators.
- 2) Implicit in this approach is the assumption that both groups are homogenous: victims and perpetrators are referred to as if they are all the same. *The* victims and *The* perpetrators.
- 3) In the worst cases, the two are set up as diametrically opposed — i.e. victims vs. perpetrators. (Borer 2003: 1089)

This suggests that the establishment of the identities of victims and perpetrators is an important aspect of speaking about and coming to terms with the past. As a result, the majority of interventionary and academic projects that seek to help societies to come to terms with violent conflict have been structured around the framework of the struggle between the victim and perpetrator. Due to this an analysis of the ways in which the victim-perpetrator paradigm is taking shape after a conflict provides a pathway through which one can study and understand the progress towards reconciliation of a post-war country.

Victors

Furthermore, the establishment of a clear victor is also tremendously important within the context of a post-conflict reconciliation process. This is because even though a reconciliation process attempts to fix a narrative of the past, it is invariably forced to do this in a limited (and limiting) way that may not always be able to accommodate all segments of the polity. Therefore, the discursive creation of the narratives of victim and perpetrator entails the making of choices — as to what perspectives and opinions should be included in this narrative and what should (or could) not be included. The identity of the victor is crucial to

the choices made in this regard. Although the establishment of a narrative of victimhood is central to a reconciliation process, the choice viz. the identity of the victim and perpetrator is made by the group that is in power. Since this fixing of narrative takes place soon after the end of the conflict, it is particularly important to the group that is in power/has taken power immediately after a conflict. I would argue that the choices that are made about the narratives as well as the parameters of a reconciliation process are political choices and are a result of the political imperatives of establishing, legitimising and stabilising control over a post-war nation-state. In other words the establishment of the identities of victims and perpetrators that is fixed by the victor simultaneously lays down the parameters of a reconciliation process while at the same time legitimising their control and power within a post-conflict situation.⁸ In terms of a reconciliation process, the establishment of the contours and limits of the identities of victim, perpetrator and victor is particularly powerful because it not only influences the response to the conflict but also establishes how the history of the conflict will be narrated and fixed.

A Note on Methodology

Therefore, in this paper I explore the discursive construction and intersection of the identities of victims, perpetrators and victors through the post-war discourse of the President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa in order to understand how this is impacting on reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Within this research my interest is in exploring the following questions:

- How does the President of Sri Lanka discursively construct the perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka?
- How does the President of Sri Lanka discursively construct the victim(s) of the conflict in Sri Lanka?
- How do these discursive construction impact on the priorities for reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka?

This paper is located epistemologically and theoretically in the framework of social constructionism. This framework is heavily shaped by the work of Berger and Luckmann who argue that reality is socially constructed and that the “organism and even more the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they were shaped” (Berger & Luckmann 1991: 68). For Berger and Luckmann, language is an integral part of this process. Therefore the analysis of language and discourse is important to understand this social construction of reality because as Jørgensen & Phillips point out:

Language... is not merely a channel through which information about underlying mental states and behaviour or facts about the world are communicated. On the

⁸ I must also clarify at this juncture that I do not attempt to claim that the Sri Lankan State is either victor, victim or perpetrator. In this paper my only interest is to explore the ways in which these identities are discursively constructed by the President and how it impacts on attempts to reconcile a deeply divided society after a protracted conflict.

contrary, language is a ‘machine’ that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world. This also extends to the constitution of social identities and social relations. It means that *changes* in discourse are a means by which the social world is changed. Struggles at the discursive level take part in changing, as well as in reproducing, the social reality. (2002: 9)

Thus, language and discourse provide useful pathways for exploring and understanding the ways in which realities are being socially constructed, reproduced and legitimated. My approach to analysing these texts has been influenced by the work of Qadri Ismail (2000) and his interpretation of the evolution of Tamil nationalist politics. Much like the documents that he chooses in order to read Tamil nationalism, I believe that these documents,

... are products of, produce, and give the reader access to, different contradictions, different conjectures in this story; they address different audiences, [and] respond to different events... In so doing, however, in being produced and producing, in addressing and responding, these three texts also — as they must — specify or fix the nation... . (Ismail 2000: 225)

Therefore, this exploration of the discursive construction of the victim and perpetrator involves the examination of texts that are attributed to the President of Sri Lanka in order to understand how he is attempting to “specify or fix” the post-war nation-state. I have adopted this approach because the office of the President of Sri Lanka is widely recognised as being the locus of executive power in Sri Lanka. However, the power of the President has traditionally had a larger impact on politics than on public administration (Wijeweera 1989).⁹

Given the enormous amount of power that is ascribed to the office of the President, it is not unrealistic to believe that the President plays a key role in determining the success of a country’s transition from war to peace. For example both F. W. de Klerk (the last white President) and Nelson Mandela (the first black President) of South Africa were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 “for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa”.¹⁰ Similarly just one year later, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee bestowed the award jointly to Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin “for their efforts to create peace in the Middle East”.¹¹ Therefore it is clear that the Head of Government of a country seeking to come to terms with violent conflict plays a key role in bringing about peace and reconciliation.

⁹ The tremendous power enjoyed by the President’s office has led to numerous campaign promises regarding the abolishment of the executive presidency in Sri Lanka by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in 1994 (Keerawella & Samarajiva 1995), the United National Party (UNP) in the General Election of 2000; Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005 (Mahinda Chinthana: Victory for Sri Lanka - Presidential Election 2005) and most recently by Sarath Fonseka (Vishvasaneeya Venasak 2010).

¹⁰ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1993/

¹¹ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1994/

Nearly four years since the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka we have reached an opportune moment to examine the way in which the President has worked towards bringing about reconciliation. In this paper I attempt this, offering a critical-reading of two key texts that mark crucial moments in Sri Lanka's post-war reconciliation process: the speech made by President Mahinda Rajapaksa announcing the end of the war to the Parliament on 19 May 2009¹² (STP) and the Mahinda Chintanaya 2010: Vision for the Future, the Presidential election manifesto of President Mahinda Rajapaksa released on 14 January 2010 (MC2010).

The STP was the first official pronouncement after the end of the war and marked the ceremonial opening of the Parliament.¹³ This speech was the first opportunity for the Head of State to sketch out a vision for what a post-war nation could be and as such provides an important starting point for the analysis of Sri Lanka's post-war development. MC2010 is the election manifesto presented by the incumbent for the first national level election since the end of the war. The election was also important because it pitted President Rajapaksa against his former army commander Sarath Fonseka who was the common candidate for three major opposition parties including the Tamil National Alliance (TNA).¹⁴ MC2010 has been chosen as a source because it represents an expression of what President Rajapaksa hoped to achieve if re-elected and in being returned to office it also indicates that the majority of the people in Sri Lanka were persuaded by this vision.¹⁵ These texts have been chosen because they represent *crucial moments in Sri Lanka's post-war trajectory towards a reconciliation process*. Although there has been a great deal of emphasis placed on the recommendations of the LLRC as a barometer for understanding and measuring Sri Lanka's progress towards reconciliation, I believe that an analysis of the President's discourse provides more analytical pathways for understanding the challenges shaping Sri Lanka's progress towards reconciliation and the development of a post-war identity.

Using these readings I explore the key issues of politics and power that are undergirding Sri Lanka's current post-war trajectory towards reconciliation. In exploring these issues I first turn my attention to the way in which the President discursively constructs the LTTE as the main perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka. I then turn to contrasting the representation of the LTTE with the construction of the identity of the state as victor. I use this as a platform to then move on to examining the President's discursive construction of the victim(s). Having explored these discursive constructions, I examine the possible implications of the intersection of these constructions for reconciliation in Sri Lanka. I conclude with some thoughts about the implications of these discursive constructions for reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka.

¹² This speech was delivered in both Sinhala and Tamil but for the purpose of this paper I have used the official English translation of this speech that is available on the President's website - http://president.gov.lk/speech_New.php?Id=74

¹³ This is because since Parliament was prorogued to mark the end of the war.

¹⁴ Fonseka was commander of the army from December 2005 to July 2009 and was responsible for the army from the time war broke out again in 2006.

¹⁵ I draw on the official English translation of "Mahinda Chintanaya 2010: Vision for the Future" for the purpose of this study.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: The President's Discourse

The Rajapaksa Presidency and Post-War Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

There is little consensus on how Mahinda Rajapaksa, the current President of Sri Lanka should be viewed. In polling term the President remains extremely popular, as evinced in the successive victories he and his political party United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) have enjoyed in post-war elections. He secured a majority of the votes (57.88%) at the Presidential Election held in January 2010. However, the results showed a substantial split in the Sri Lankan polity with the majority of the votes in minority areas being won by the common opposition candidate and former army commander, Sarath Fonseka. A similar voting trend was witnessed during the General Elections held in April 2010 in which the President's party fell six seats short of securing a two-thirds majority in the legislature. This has been read as an indication of the deep alienation felt by the Tamil community towards the President's regime that was further intensified during the last stages of the war (Uyangoda 2011: 132). The paradox of securing an overwhelming majority in Parliament whilst lacking support in minority areas has debunked the long held assumption that minority support was essential for winning a majority in the legislature (Uyangoda 2011: 133). Significantly, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a political party that claims to represent the Tamil people in the North and East and which only contested the General Elections in the North and East, secured 14 seats and thereby became the third largest party in Parliament.¹⁶

In a country that is seeking to come to terms with a civil war that was fought primarily on ethnic grounds, the persistence of these divisions point to a serious challenge for any attempt at reconciliation. Due to the support he enjoys among the Sinhala majority, the President is ideally placed to overcome this challenge. However, the President's critics have frequently pointed out that under his presidency Sri Lanka has shifted towards a more authoritarian rule (Hensman 2010). Some have gone so far as to say that the President is attempting to secure dynastic rule (DeVotta 2011). This has led analysts like Jayadeva Uyangoda to suggest that the post-war government headed by the President focuses more attention on regime consolidation than on reconciliation (2010: 134). In this context the discourse used by the President after the war can provide key insights that can help understand the seemingly slow progress of reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Constructing Perpetrators and Victors – The LTTE and the State

In this section, I explore the way in which the LTTE is discursively constructed by the President as the main perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka. This is done skilfully by establishing the LTTE as the Other to the Sri Lankan state by fixing the LTTE as an outsider, establishing a narrative of the role of the LTTE in Sri Lanka's conflict, representing the ruthlessness and strength of the LTTE and finally representing the LTTE as the focal point of a larger network of perpetrators who have victimised the Sri Lankan Nation-State. This

¹⁶ http://www.slections.gov.lk/parliamentary_elections/AICOM.html

construction is furthered by the particular construction of the identity of the State as the victor that is in contrast to the narrative of the LTTE as the main perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The establishment of the LTTE as the perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka is done first by establishing the LTTE as being an outsider/invader and therefore the Other to the people of the 'motherland'. In the STP the President says:

In looking at this unconquerable history there is a common factor we can see. It is the inability of any external enemy to subdue this country as long as those to whom this is the motherland stand united. That is the truth. Another common factor we can see is the inability to establish any savage or dictatorial regime on this land. In the history of my motherland, the people have always risen undefeated against any arbitrary, savage or brutal rule. (2009)

This statement is followed almost immediately by the mention of various invaders and colonisers, and this works to represent the LTTE as a brutal outsider/invader.¹⁷ Furthermore, the representation of the LTTE as the outsider/invader is further strengthened by being set against the people of 'my motherland' which works to establish the President and the people of the 'motherland' as comprising the original/native inhabitants of the nation. By separating the LTTE from the nation it is possible to lay the groundwork for representing the LTTE as the perpetrators of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, the President's discourse then seeks to affirm that this outsider/invader is both the problem and the cause of the conflict in Sri Lanka. This is done through the flattening and simplification of the historical complexities of the conflict in Sri Lanka and limiting the conflict to the time during which the LTTE was in operation. The President says: "The LTTE terrorists began the march to own half of this country, having assassinated the Mayor of Jaffna in 1975, and began their journey to divide the country into two. At that time the terrorists did not hold a single inch of land in the entire north and east"(STP 2009). This frames the parameters of the conflict in terms of the period during which 'terrorism' was prevalent in the country, specifically the time period during which the LTTE was in operation. Significantly although there were a number of Tamil militant groups, the President focuses solely on the LTTE, further strengthening his framing of the LTTE as the sole perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka. As Neil DeVotta has noted, the rhetorical tactic of laying the blame for the war solely at the feet of the LTTE has long been employed by ideologues of Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism who promote the idea that "Sri Lanka does not have an ethnic problem, it merely has a terrorist problem" (2007: 37). As a result the President's discourse works to establish the LTTE as both the problem and the cause of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

¹⁷ I shall show later on how the representation of the LTTE as an outsider also makes possible a more nuanced reading of victimisation.

The President's discourse does not stop at establishing the LTTE as the main perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka but also seeks to legitimise and fix a narrative of the kind of perpetrator the LTTE had become prior to its defeat by the armed forces. This is built carefully on the binary oppositions of good/evil and strong/weak. The President's speech to Parliament begins by typecasting the LTTE as 'murderous terrorists'. Later on in STP he also uses the term 'ruthless' as an adjective to describe the LTTE. These adjectives function as markers that establish the 'evilness' and 'strength' of the LTTE. In contrast to this the State is represented as being both 'good' (in opposition to the LTTE's 'evilness') and 'helpless' (in opposition to the LTTE's 'strength'). This is perhaps most clearly seen in the STP when the President says "there was no school of war in the world that could face up to the savage military strategies used by the terrorists of the LTTE. The world had not seen military sciences able to face a combination of land mines, claymore mines, small suicide vessels, light aircraft that can evade radar, and suicide killer jackets" (2009). Noticeable here is the representation of the helplessness of the State in the face of the strength of the LTTE. This is overlaid on the binary opposition of good/evil through the choice of military tactics that suggests that the LTTE did not really play fair in war. This works to reinforce the trope of brutality and ruthlessness of the LTTE.

The President's discourse also seeks to make explicit linkages between the LTTE and other actors. In the absence of the LTTE (following its defeat) the diffusion of perpetrators is also an important aspect of the President's discourse (as I will show later). In the STP the President takes pains to criticise the previous government's peace accord. He notes, "The biggest danger was that the north and east of this country were brought together and gifted through a deed of peace to this destructive terrorist organization". This works to link and blame the current Opposition for their role in the victimisation of the larger polity by the LTTE. In MC2010 this suggestion is further developed to include international organisations and actors. The President notes:

I am also pleased that I was able to defeat the conspiracy to grant oil exploration rights to a Norwegian Company, TGS Nopec, through the operation of an illegal ceasefire agreement through which the Northern and Eastern sea coast of our country were to be handed over to the brutal terrorist outfit, LTTE. I annulled such illegal ceasefire agreement. As a result, we are now able to reap the benefits of our seas, and in turn, divert such benefits into resurrecting our national economy, which we have been able to free from the clutches of dubious international organizations and ruthless terrorists. (MC2010: 16)

Note here the nexus that is created between the ceasefire agreement, dubious international organisations and ruthless terrorists. Also noticeable here is the evocation of the belief that the ceasefire agreement also enabled the exploitation of Sri Lanka's natural resources by global capital (represented by the 'Norwegian company, TGS Nopec'). This in effect works to complicate the narrative of the single perpetrator which is elsewhere represented as the LTTE. In spite of this contradiction it is clear that these other perpetrators are represented as extensions of the LTTE. However, the LTTE continues to be represented and fixed as the

main perpetrator and the focal point of unconscionable violence against and therefore threat to the State.

The identity of the LTTE as the perpetrator is further strengthened by the careful construction of the identity of the State as victor of the conflict. The discourse of the President very carefully constructs the State as an ethical victor who has triumphed in the face of overwhelming odds. For example in the STP the President says “What terrorism draws from politics is racism. It builds an economy through drug trafficking. What it draws from technology is the manufacture of explosives”(2009). Note here the way in which the President associates the LTTE with racism, drug trafficking and the manufacture of explosives. In contrast, the President immediately states, “we did not attempt to respond to the terrorists in their own language. When the terrorists were calling for war, we responded with a humanitarian operation. Our troops went to this operation carrying a gun in one hand, the Human Rights Charter in the other, hostages on their shoulders, and the love of their children in their hearts”(2009). These lines immediately establish a stark contrast between the approach of the LTTE and the approach of the State. The contrasting of these approaches is also prominent in MC2010. The President notes:

I even engaged in a discussion with the LTTE on the Ceasefire Agreement which was a threat to national security, the pride and sovereignty of the country... The response of the LTTE was to use the non-confrontational discussions to strengthen their war effort as done before. The terrorist attack that was launched from the Mavil Aru prompted us to launch a humanitarian operation to achieve an honourable peace. Our forces gained victory after victory by launching attacks by air, sea and land and were able to unite this country with the determination of an undivided country and honourable peace. (MC2010: 57-58)

These lines are a good example of the way in which the President’s discourse constructs and emphasises a contrast between ‘the humanitarian operation’ launched by the State and ‘the terrorist attacks’ launched by the LTTE. Furthermore, the President also points to the unethical behaviour of the LTTE who attempted to use “non-confrontational discussions to strengthen their war effort” (MC2010: 57-58). Furthermore, in the STP the President also emphasises the magnanimity of the State towards the ‘murderous terrorists’. He points out “the terrorist leader who was killed yesterday, until that time had his meals with the food and drink that the government supplied”(2009). Therefore, the President’s discourse on the LTTE as the main perpetrator is strengthened by downplaying the might/strength of the Sri Lankan State while amplifying the power/ strength/ruthlessness of the LTTE.

This indicates that the President’s discourse works to fix the LTTE as the Other to the Sri Lankan Nation-State. This is important because as Baudrillard has argued “as soon as ‘the Other’ can be represented it can also be appropriated and controlled”. (Baudrillard, 1983 as paraphrased by Perera, 1998) As I have shown, an important aspect of this appropriation and control has been to amplify the power of the LTTE while at the same time diminish the capacity of the Sri Lankan State to respond to this power. As I will argue later on in this paper,

these discursive choices have numerous implications for the understanding of reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Constructing Victim(s) and Victor(s)

Having examined the construction of the LTTE as the main perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka, I now turn to examining the discursive construction of the victim in the President's discourse. However, this discursive construction of victimhood is also carefully and explicitly linked to the construction of the victor identity as well. Due to this, in this section I seek to explore the discursive construction of each of the victims and its concomitant impact on the construction of the victor identity. I find that the President discursively constructs not one but three different victims — the collective body, the Tamils as special victims of the LTTE and the Sinhalese as the 'real' victims of the LTTE. This fracturing of the victim identity also directly impacts on the discursive construction of the victor as well.

Separating Victims: The Collective as Victim and Victor

President Rajapaksa's discourse on victimhood initially identifies the collective body of the people of Sri Lanka as the core victim group; a community united by the shared experience of the LTTE's 'murderous terrorism'. It is notable that the President's discourse constructs a shared experience of victimisation, the victimisation of a multi-ethnic body (or nation), and a victimisation that also includes the physical space of the country.

The President goes to great length to establish the presence of a collective body of victims in Sri Lanka. The first line that is delivered in Sinhala by the President in the STP reads: "at the historic occasion when the hopes and expectations of the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay and all people of our country for several decades, to see a Sri Lanka that is free of murderous terrorism, have been realized" (2009). It is worth noting here that the 'people of our country' are defined solely on ethnic terms. Therefore, the sense of inclusiveness that this assertion speaks to is one of ethnic inclusion. This idea is developed further in the STP where he notes "The nation lost several thousand lives and much property and assets. Hundreds of religious dignitaries, as well as national leaders such as R. Premadasa and Rajiv Gandhi, and great ministers such as Lakshman Kadirgamar, Gamini Dissanayake, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle and A. H. M. Ashroff were lost to us"(2009).

What is noticeable here is that in spite of the many politicians who have been assassinated by the LTTE from many sides of the ethnic/political divide, the President's choices speak to a collective ethnic body.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lakshman Kadirgamar was a Tamil politician in the Government, A.H.M Ashroff was a prominent Muslim MP and founder of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle identified himself as a Colombo Chetty (a small ethnic group in Sri Lanka) and a Roman Catholic. The choice of A.H.M. Ashroff who died when the helicopter he was in crashed mysteriously in the Sabaragamuwa Province (away from LTTE-dominated areas) is also interesting.

Furthermore, the President builds on the idea of this multi-ethnic body, to point out that the collective identity of this multi-ethnic body (or nation) was forged because of the common/shared experience of victimisation at the hands of the LTTE. Therefore the evocation of the many ethnic communities with which the STP begins, establishes a sense of who the people of the country are — “Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay and all other people” — creating a sense of unity and fixing a narrative of shared experience — a collective body that has been collectively victimised by the LTTE. This idea is developed even further in MC2010 where the President notes that the soldiers “did not unite only our country but they also united the expectations of all ethnic groups” (MC2010: 58). Therefore it is the shared experience of terrorism (and the victimisation due to terrorism) that enables the identification of Sri Lanka as a collective body of victims.

Moreover, it is also clear that the President’s articulation of a collective victimisation includes the victimisation of the physical space of the country by the LTTE.¹⁹ At two different points in MC2010 the President draws attention to the impact of terrorism on the physical space of Sri Lanka. He notes that one of his main priorities if elected president would be to re-open and modernise “all sanctuaries such as Wilpaththu, Kumana, Yan Oya, and Mundikulam which were closed due to terrorist activities” (MC2010: 67). Furthermore, he notes that because of terrorism “In 2005, only one third of the sea area due to us was under our control. With the defeat of terrorism, Sri Lankans are now able to reap the benefits of the total sea area that the country is entitled to” (MC2010: 89). Therefore it is also clear that the victimisation of the collective body by the LTTE is not limited to people but also includes the physical space of the country as well.

The establishment of a narrative of a collective body that had been victimised by the LTTE also makes possible the narrative of the collective body as victor. This is clearly visible in MC2010 by the use of the term ‘we’ at the very beginning of the document. The President opens MC2010 by saying — “We defeated terrorism and separatism, which outcome at one time was thought to be impossible. We are now ready to lead our children and our nation to a brighter future as stakeholders of a truly free motherland”(MC2010: 7).²⁰ Through the use of plural pronouns (we and our) in these lines the President attempts to signify both a common experience of victimisation as well as a common victory over this victimisation. The linkage between victim and victor is further advanced in relation to the physical space of the country as well. This is evident when the President partially blames the LTTE for the human-elephant conflict by stating that “Unplanned development and terrorism have destroyed our national parks and sanctuaries. Consequently, elephants have invaded villages and have created an

¹⁹ This is why I have chosen to emphasise a collective body rather than a collective identity as it allows space for broadening the psycho-social impact of this victimisation into physical dimensions as well. This section is heavily influenced by the work of Perera (1998).

²⁰ Although the Sinhala version is far more sparing with the use of pronouns, a similar sentiment is still visible.

elephant human conflict” (ibid: 67). Later on, the President seems to suggest that the victory over the LTTE would also make it possible for nature and humans to live in harmony.

Therefore, the President discursively constructs a body of victimhood that encompasses the people as well as the physical space of the country. However, in spite of this narration of wholeness and unity through a collective victimisation, a closer analysis reveals that this sense of unity is subverted by the discursive construction of multiple victims.

Separating Victims: The Tamils as Special Category of Victims and Victor

The claimed homogeneity of the victim (as a collective body) is both supported and subverted by the President’s efforts to differentiate between the Tamil community and the LTTE. The analysed texts pay special attention to the Tamils. On the one hand these texts go to extraordinary lengths to define the Tamil community as being part of the plural, multi-ethnic Sri Lankan populace. At the same time however, a central aspect of this differentiation process is the often repeated assertion that the LTTE threatened the Tamils even more than any other ethnic group in the country, thus making them a special category of victim.

The effort made by the President to establish the inclusion of the Tamil polity within this collective body can be seen in his choice to speak in Tamil during the STP (an indication that he was hoping to reach out to the Tamil community) with his careful choice of opening words:

This is our country
This is our mother land
We should live in this country as children of one mother
No differences of race, caste and religion should prevail here. (2009)

The immediate use of the pronoun ‘our’ — a term that peppers the lines that are spoken in Tamil is significant. In using the pronoun ‘our’ President Rajapaksa attempts to signify a common or shared experience with the Tamil people whom he is addressing. However, the term ‘our’ also signifies a sense of ownership and possessiveness. This interpretation of ‘our’ is far more controversial given that the LTTE, the recently defeated ‘enemy’, had been fighting to establish a separate state *for* the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. When reverting to Sinhalese President Rajapaksa again uses the term ‘our’. Speaking of the effect of terrorism on the country the President notes that, “Our people began to face a defeatist mentality, whether we could face up to a problem that many countries in the world the world did not seem able to face”(2009). It would appear here that the term ‘our people’ is significantly different from the term ‘our’ used in Tamil because he makes a differentiation in his speech between the effect of terrorism on ‘our people’ and on ‘the Tamil people’. My point here is that clearly the term ‘our’ has multiple meanings. The President is seeking to articulate the ‘oneness’ of the collective body but at the same time emphasises particular differences in order to gain legitimacy. I believe this is a purposeful rhetorical turn, but one that requires flagging in order

to frame it within the larger debate of how the different communities of Sri Lanka are to be accommodated by the State in the post-war context.

Furthermore, by seeking to establish and legitimate the inclusion of the Tamil community with in the Sri Lankan polity, the President also seeks to place the Tamil community in opposition to the LTTE in much the same way that he has done in relation to the victimisation of the collective body. For example in the STP the President claims that:

It is the LTTE that has put the Tamil community to their lowest position in history. Those who raised their voices for the protection of the terrorists, and all those who helped the terrorists should now fall at the feet of these Tamil mothers and seek their pardon. Those who live abroad and supported the terrorists with funds, if they have any love for their own people, should not help terrorism again. (2009)

This idea is taken a step further in MC2010 when the President says that “my government and I are fully aware that it is the Tamils and Muslims who lived in the Northern and Eastern Provinces were the most affected by the conflict that lasted for 30 years” (MC2010: 61). By placing special emphasis on the effect of the LTTE on the Tamil people the President works to discursively establish the LTTE as being in opposition to the Tamil people of the country. On the one hand this rhetorical twist works to separate the Tamil people from the LTTE which enables the President to de-legitimise the LTTE’s claims to be the sole representative of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. This makes it possible to posit the special victimhood of the Tamil polity at the hands of the LTTE. This is why the President takes steps to demonstrate that the victory of the state over the LTTE is a victory for the Tamil people too. In fact in the STP, he states that “Their hearts are now with us who liberated from the slavery they had been forced into”(2009) before going so far as to say that “the complete defeat of the LTTE is an even greater victory for the Tamil people” (2009). It is also noticeable here that the President again constructs a differentiation between the Tamil people, the LTTE but also the collective body/nation of Sri Lanka. This is evinced in his differentiation between the ‘their hearts’ and ‘us’. This works to set the Tamil people apart as a separate victim and therefore a separate victor over the LTTE.

Hence, the President’s construction of the victimisation of the Tamil people by the LTTE performs multiple functions. On the one hand it delinks the LTTE and the Tamil people thereby de-legitimising the LTTE’s claims to be the sole-representative of the Tamil people. This enables him to construct a narrative which emphasises the claim that the Tamil people are also victors over the LTTE in their own right. However, this also works to differentiate and subvert the construction of a collective experience of victimisation and victory over the LTTE.

The Sinhalese as Victim and Victor in the President's Discourse

Apart from the construction of the victimisation of the Tamils (as a subsection of the main victim group — the collective Sri Lankan people), the President also constructs a concurrent narrative of the victimisation and victory of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

One of the key ways in which the Sinhalese are affirmed as victims of the LTTE is through the evocation of historical motifs and symbols. For example in the STP the President makes direct comparisons between the terrorism of the LTTE and the 'savage invaders and enemies' of the past such as "Datiya, Pitiya, Palayamara, Siva and Elara in the past, [and] the Portuguese, Dutch and British"(2009) and compares the defeat of terrorism with the defeat of these invaders. The spectre of the invader has long been a powerful trope in Sinhala nationalist consciousness (DeVotta 2007). The invader/coloniser was the central Other used during the Sinhala-Buddhist revival that was spearheaded by various nationalist leaders who led revolts against the British colonisers in the 19th century as well as by the renowned Sinhala-Buddhist revivalist leader — Anagarika Dharmapala (Jayawardena 1985). In the same way that the Orient is one of Europe's "deepest and most recurring image of the Other" (Said 1978), it may be argued that the foreigner is one of the Sinhalese people's deepest and most recurring image of the Other. In re-invoking this trope, this aspect of President's discourse on victimhood is framed in such a way that it has specific relevance only for the Sinhalese. Moreover, in the Mahāwamsa, the conflict between Dutthagāmini and Elāra is framed as a conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils (DeVotta 2007). The invocation of this meta-narrative further emphasises the victimisation of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation and polity, contradicting the (seemingly) inclusive comments with which the STP begins.

This polemical device is again used in MC2010. MC2010 draws on the shared history and ideology of the Sinhala nation in order to create legitimacy and as an election manifesto, popular appeal for the President. The manifesto makes reference to kings such as Pandukabhaya (MC2010: 53) and Ravana (MC2010: 13). Both references are highly political. Ravana has been claimed as the ancestor of both the Sinhalese and the Tamils in order to substantiate their respective claims to being the original inhabitants of the island (Perera 1995) and King Pandukabhaya is widely thought to be the first locally born Sinhalese king of Sri Lanka.²¹ This narrative also makes reference to the place of the farmer and the importance of the irrigation system to the 2,500 year old civilisation. It highlights "The Tank and the Field; the Tank next to the Dagoba. This is our social foundation; our very special heritage"(MC 2010:81). This notion of a 'special heritage' based on the relationship between the tank, field and dagoba refers to the historical Sinhala-Buddhist nation that existed under the above mentioned kings and therefore appeals specifically to the Sinhalese population. Benedict Anderson raises a question about why nations chose to celebrate "their hoariness [but] not their astonishing youth" (1986: 659). In this context the 'hoariness' of an explicitly Sinhala-

²¹ There is an interesting case made for this view in the recent film by Jackson Anthony called Abā.

Buddhist nation is clearly meant to reach out to the Sinhalese masses among whom an ideology such as this is pervasive.

It is this historical meta-narrative of the Sinhala-Buddhists that the President also draws on in order to contextualise the victory over LTTE. For example in the STP, special reference is made to the fact that Sri Lanka is a country of 182 kings²² and a history of 2,500 years.²³ This narrative works to affirm both the unity and longevity of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation. There is also frequent reference to the times of Sinhalese kings such as Dutugemunu, Valagamba, Dhatusena and Vijayabahu. The President places the achievement of defeating terrorism on par with the exploits of these kings thus placing himself within this lineage.

Therefore, although a cursory reading of these texts suggests a very inclusive understanding of victimhood, a closer reading shows that the President's discourse seeks to fix and demarcate the Sinhala-Buddhist nation as being the real victims of the LTTE. This narrative is further emphasised through the President's discourse on victors which seeks to affirm the longevity of the Sinhala-Buddhist state and through this lay claim to a specifically Sinhala-Buddhist heritage.²⁴

Making Sense of the Victim-Victor Nexus: Implications for Reconciliation

In the previous section I have sought to draw out the ways in which the President discursively constructs multiple victims of the LTTE. This construction is closely linked with the construction of each victim as a victor as well. In this sense the President's discourse constructs the identity of multiple victorious victims. The manner in which the Presidential discourse constructs one perpetrator and multiple victims has a number of implications for prospects for reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka.

A Terrorist Problem not an Ethnic Conflict

The President's discourse makes clear that over the past 30 years Sri Lanka has had to grapple with a terrorist problem rather than an ethnic conflict. This narrativisation is tellingly silent about the causes of terrorism or the attempts made by various Tamil leaders to engage with the State to establish an inclusive plural nation in the years prior to the slaying of Alfred Duraiyappah in 1975. As a result of this silence, there is no acceptance of the grievances faced by Tamil people through incidents such as the language only act, standardisation, the burning of the Jaffna Library etc.²⁵ Furthermore, this construction works to establish an idyllic, romanticised view of life prior to the LTTE. This is done through the silencing of any tension between communities prior to the establishment of the LTTE. Implicit in this is the

²² Another reference to the historical record of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation rather than Sri Lanka as a whole because this line makes reference to the lineage of kings that are set out in texts such as the Mahāwamsa (seen as a Sinhala-Buddhist historical text).

²³ A reference to the Buddhist calendar.

²⁴ For a more in-depth discussion on the conception of heritage in Sri Lanka today see Wickramasinghe 2012.

²⁵ For a better and more comprehensive discussion on this see Hoole, Somasundaram, Sritharan & Thiranagama (1990). Also see T. Sabaratnam's Political Biography of Amirthalingam (1996).

affirmation of the promise that the government has made to returning Sri Lanka back to its shared past (Ismail 2000). I believe that this is a result of the way in which the perpetrator has been framed by the discourse on the war. By eliminating discussion on the issues that led the Tamil ethnic minority to take up arms²⁶ and replacing it that with a discourse of ‘murderous terrorism’, the President is able to limit the scope of post-war interventions that would be seen as beneficial to the ethnic minorities.

It is also clear that the President’s discourse has specific repercussions for minorities living in Sri Lanka after the war. During the STP the President categorically noted that:

We have removed the word minorities from our vocabulary three years ago. No longer are the Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any others minorities. There are only two peoples in this country. One is the people that love this country. The other comprises the small groups that have no love for the land of their birth. Those who do not love the country are now a lesser group. (2009)

By making this claim the President sought to re-cast the paradigms of ethnicity that divided the country. The timeframe used here (three years) is also significant because 2006 is the year in which the final phase of the war started, ostensibly because of the LTTE’s closure of the Maavil Aru sluice gate. It is also important to question as to why it is the term ‘minority’ rather than ‘majority’ that is to be removed from ‘our vocabulary.’ Such phrasing is unlikely to have been accidental and may be rooted in a belief that the majority *should* be treated as a majority. This brings to the fore questions regarding the understanding of the term ‘equality’ within a reconciliation process: What is equal treatment? Who should decide? What is it equal to — power, proportion of the population?

In Search of Solutions

These questions are important because they have a direct impact on the responses to the conflict. Since the collective body was victimised, it is the collective body that must find solutions to the conflict. This is evident when the President notes in the STP that any solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka “...cannot be an imported solution. We do not have the time to be experimenting with the solutions suggested by other countries. Therefore, it is necessary that we find a solution that is our very own, of our own nation”(2009). The President’s use of the terms ‘we’ and ‘our’ speak to a collective body that will map out a solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka. However, the use of term ‘we’ here is deliberately vague and therefore makes it “impossible to specify who the we refers to”(Pennebaker 2011). This ambiguity is important because the President goes on to claim that ‘our solution’, “should be a solution acceptable to all sections of the people”.

²⁶ See the “Resolution of Convention–Vaddukoddai” as an example of this. See full text of resolution here http://www.sangam.org/FB_HIST_DOCS/vaddukod.htm

Furthermore, placing Tamil grievances with the state outside the wartime narrative has enabled the President to disregard or downplay Tamil grievances and demands in the present — particularly the demand for a political solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka. In reference to the need for a political solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka, MC2010 also speaks about the creation of a new path for national cohabitation based on a consensus.

It is extremely difficult to arrive at consensus in a conflict rife with disillusionment, divisions, individual views and bloodshed. However, we have already laid the foundation to achieve consensus. While I agree that everyone has the right to his or her opinion it is my contention that we need to arrive at consensus on the facts. It is this wide national consensus that is required for national cohabitation. (MC2010: 58)

However, in the Mahinda Chintanaya 2005, President Rajapaksa asserted that he “would abide by the majority consensus, which is a fundamental principle of democracy” (MC2010: 33). In this context a question of what does consensus mean arises — and this question is underpinned by a larger tension between competing understandings of equality viz. the minority and majority. In short, equality to the majority would reflect their proportion of the population (or political power) whereas this conception is unlikely to receive much acceptance from the minority communities.

The Contours of a Solution

As a result the President’s discourse suggests that the main foci of a solution to the conflict will be centred on the questions of security, the holding of elections and ensuring economic development. In MC2010 which sets out the President’s specific proposals for moving forward after the war, the President notes that “While the humanitarian operations were in progress, I also introduced a new national political-military strategy. This was based on disarmament, democratization and development” (MC2010: 58). In these lines the President sketches out the contours of his solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka. What is clear is that this solution is built around the establishment of a nexus between democracy, development and security.

It would appear that the President’s understanding of democracy as a solution to the conflict is limited to the holding of local government elections. In detailing the speed with which he and the government moved to respond to the conflict he notes that “democracy was restored in all areas liberated from terrorism by holding Local government elections”. The President implies that the areas under the LTTE are undemocratic and under-developed as opposed to all areas in the rest of the country. It is also clear that this understanding of democracy is limited to its procedural terms — the holding of elections. However, what is less clear is the functioning of democracy in the context of a ‘political-military strategy’.

This is also true of development as well. In MC2010, which has been titled “A Brighter Future”,²⁷ the trope of the future plays an extremely powerful role. Laying down the steps that would be taken for the benefit of the people who had ‘been most affected by the war: the people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, in MC2010 the President states:

I am aware that there are wives who have lost their husbands; parents who have lost their children; children who have lost their parents. There are disabled people and displaced people who lost their property. Therefore even before ending the war, infrastructure facilities and livelihood opportunities were provided for those living in the eastern province under the Eastern Revival program. It is my focused resolution to provide all these benefits to the people of the North, under the Northern Spring program. Therefore, a large scale development programme that encompasses economic and infrastructure development is already underway under the Northern Spring program. (MC2010: 61)

It is noticeable here that the task of developing the North would be spearheaded by the Northern Spring Programme which comes under the purview of the Central Government and not that of the local authority. Therefore although the President has articulated a particular framework for the restoration of democracy, in practice it also clear that there are limits within which it must operate. Furthermore, as an alternative the President proposes to bring about economic development as a means of resolving minority grievances. This is rooted in the identification of the issue as a terrorist problem rather than as an ethnic conflict. As commentators have noted the government of Sri Lanka appears to be working on “the assumption that economic recovery combined with the reestablishment of sub-national democratic institutions in the north and east of the country will take care of all remaining minority grievances” (Anonymous 2011).²⁸ Furthermore, the President’s discourse makes clear that development is also an area that will be heavily militarised. This is evident from the way in which the President establishes a relationship between economic development and the military in MC2010 when he says that “the people of our country are now awaiting the victory in the ‘economic war’, in a manner similar to our victory in the war against terrorism” (MC2010: 1). Similar associations are made throughout MC2010 that seek to establish a link between the victory over the LTTE and the priorities for development.

In this context it is hardly surprising that the President’s discourse seeks to emphasise the need for heightened vigilance and concern for national security. He notes

I do not believe the threat to the security of our country has been completely eliminated although the brutal terrorism in our land has been defeated. I am fully aware that it is possible that security threats could emerge in various forms and

²⁷ This was also the President’s campaign slogan.

²⁸ Interestingly the proposals for development of in the North and East are quite similar to the proposals made for the development of facilities for the families of soldiers who have also been posited as being a group that has ‘suffered most’ due to the LTTE (MC2010:28).

circumstances. However, I am confident that our brave armed forces will be able to face any challenge, with fortitude for the sake of our country. Therefore, I will ensure that our forces are strong at all times. (MC2010: 30)

Importantly here although ‘brutal’ terrorism has been eliminated, the threat to the post-war nation still appears to exist. This is why the forces must remain ‘strong at all times’. It is also interesting to note here the martial logic at work in positing the threats to the nation as being solely militaristic in nature since there is a need to ensure that it is the forces that are strong at all times.

Therefore, it is clear that the President’s priorities for reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka are built around the establishment of a nexus between security, economic development and a particular understanding of democracy. This nexus is significant because it enables the militarisation of politics and development.²⁹

The Contours of Reconciliation

In the context of the establishment and emphasis on a nexus between security, democracy and development it is also important to explore the way in which this influences the President’s understanding of reconciliation. A *prima facie* reading of the STP suggests the President is deeply concerned about the contours of reconciliation. In fact in the STP the President makes mention of the way in which Dutugemunu treated Elāra after death to argue that the State would “respect even the enemy that has surrendered or been killed in combat”. However, he immediately goes on to say

We who are schooled in the Buddhist tradition of loving kindness and compassion, and nurtured in the Hindu, Islam and Christian traditions, do not need to be taught how we should treat and care for the innocent and helpless. We shall resettle all those who have been freed from being hostages in very welcome surroundings. People who have not had electricity and not seen modern roads will be resettled in environments complete with all facilities. I ask you to compare the living conditions of the people in the East three years ago with what it is today. (2009)

These lines are interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, the President immediately places a greater emphasis on the Buddhist tradition in comparison to the other religions in Sri Lanka by differentiating between being ‘schooled’ and being ‘nurtured’. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the President emphasises the need for treatment and care ‘for the innocent and helpless’. This claim also works to underscore the lack of agency among those who are at the receiving end of this treatment and care. As a result it is hardly surprising that this treatment and care is

²⁹ Enloe defines militarisation as “a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but normal” (Enloe 2000: 3).

limited to resettlement and the improvement of living conditions through economic development.

However, what is most significant about the President's discourse is the message that it lays down about the response to calls for accountability. As I pointed out before the President goes to great lengths to establish a contrast between the power/strength/ruthlessness of the LTTE and the helplessness/weakness/magnanimity of the State. In terms of reconciliation the establishment of this narrative not only furthers the trope of the magnitude of the victory of the Sri Lankan State in the face of overwhelming odds but more importantly works to downplay and indemnify the actions of the State during the war. This discursive construction is for me one of the main reasons why Sri Lanka's trajectory towards a reconciliation process (particularly a reconciliation process as understood and articulated by Tamil political parties and the international community) has been so slow. This is because as the President's discourse shows, not only is the LTTE the sole perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka but through the actions of the armed forces it has already been held accountable for its actions during the conflict. Furthermore, this was achieved without re-configuring the State structure which was one of the main demands of the Tamil polity before and during the conflict. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Sri Lankan State is resistant to any attempt to hold it accountable for its own actions during the conflict.

Reconciliation and the Role of the President

In this context it is also hardly surprising that the President discursively styles himself as both a victim (as a member of the collective national community) and as the primary protector of the people.

In the STP the President begins by using the term 'our' to position himself within the collective, multi-ethnic national community who are portrayed as the victims of LTTE aggression. However, almost as soon as the President switches back to speaking in Sinhala from Tamil, he makes reference to his personal role in achieving the victory. This places him both inside and outside the conceptual 'our' that is invoked through his previous comments and frames him as a victim whilst simultaneously affirming his role as protector.

Similarly MC2010 begins by affirming his achievement "In my first term in office, I won for you the peace you were yearning for" (emphasis added). It is important to note here the way in which the President immediately places himself outside the 'you' that was yearning for peace. By doing this he is also able to emphasise what 'I' achieved. This rhetorical turn works to establish a separate identity for the President — as the protector of the nation state. However, a few lines later he reverts back to being part of the collective body by using the pronoun 'we' — "We defeated terrorism and separatism, which outcome at one time was thought to be impossible. We are now ready to lead our children and our nation to a brighter future as stakeholders of a truly free motherland" (MC2010: 7). This, as Maneri has pointed

out, works to create a separation between me-you which is then overlaid on to the *us-them* separation that has been created by the Othering of the LTTE. This in turn works to “produce [a discourse of] me-you-us versus them” (Maneri 2010: 165). It also creates “a vertical unity, in which the community, is treated as an infant and sheltered under the protective umbrella of its leaders with whom it simultaneously identifies”(Maneri 2010: 165). This enables the President to actively style himself as the protector of the victims of the LTTE — the sole perpetrator in the Sri Lanka civil war.

Therefore, the discursive construction of victim, perpetrator and victor identities clearly shape and determine the extent and legitimacy of the reconciliation process in so far as the President is concerned. However, the choices made by the President in this regard also have implications for Sri Lanka’s trajectory towards a meaningful reconciliation process.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to deconstruct the President’s discourse through the lens of victims, perpetrators and victors. I have attempted to demonstrate how these identities intersect and impinge on the President’s understanding of reconciliation. I have argued that although the President makes clear that the LTTE is the main perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka, his discourse on victimhood is complex and multi-dimensional. This suggests that:

in the ‘war against’ [a commonly constructed enemy], the nation’s identity is stronger than ever, although this consists, of course, in a strained unity that hides hierarchies and inequalities, conflicts between interests and different prospects. (Maneri 2010: 162)

The multi-dimensional nature of this discourse is an indication of how, in narrating a nation “the ‘people’ come to be constructed within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement. The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where the claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address” (Bhabha 1990: 297). This crisis within the process of signification and discursive address is firmly rooted in the question of the identity of the post-war Sri Lankan State.

It is clear that the LTTE is a crucial axis for the President’s discourse on reconciliation and post-war identity. As I have shown the President chooses to posit a single perpetrator as being responsible for the crisis facing the Sri Lankan State, the collective body, the Tamils and other minorities and the Sinhalese — the LTTE. Through the hate-speech targeted at the LTTE the President seeks to establish the LTTE as the Other through which the identity of the post-war subject (the nation) is formed. As Salecl makes clear:

... the prime intention of injurious speech is to provoke the person assaulted to question his or her identity and to perceive him or herself as inferior. But the speaker

also seeks another response: by uttering injurious speech the speaker searches for confirmation of his or her own identity. (2000: 120)

Therefore, by using hate-speech against the LTTE the President attempts to confirm the identity of the post-war nation-state. However, in order for this identity to be confirmed, the target (the LTTE) must also be aware of and respond to this affirmation. It is only through this that the formation of the subject through hate-speech is possible (2000: 12). As long as the LTTE was in existence, the hate-speech against it provided the justification as well as the impetus for the government headed by the President to wage war. It also enabled the nation-state to affirm its own identity in opposition to that of the LTTE. The problem however, is that as the President continuously affirms, the LTTE has been decimated and therefore cannot respond (and through this affirm) the identity of the post-war state. The only alternative left to the President is to compromise and establish the presence of a threat (a spectre) of the LTTE that may return at any moment unless he intervenes to prevent it. It is this threat of return that enables the President to argue that the nation is still in need of his protection.

However, the continued presence of the LTTE in some form at least, subverts the claim that it has been completely decimated. This claim itself is problematic for the President because by decimating the LTTE he has kept his promise to the nation. However, by affirming the fact that he has kept his promise, the President is now on the verge of becoming redundant since the LTTE no longer exists and therefore he is no longer needed by the nation. As Ismail points out:

Metaphorically speaking, nationalism promises to take its nationals home, to end homelessness and homesickness, represents itself as the ultimate and exclusive cure for nostalgia. However, this promise is one that cannot be kept; for, if that were to happen, if it actually delivered on its promise, nationalism would have exhausted its obligations and would find itself with nothing left to do. (Ismail 2000: 219)

This provokes another crisis for the President because he has to continuously keep affirming both the possibility and the impossibility of the return of the LTTE. In other words the LTTE is at once both a presence and an absence in the formation of the identity of the post-war nation-state.

This also means that the narrative on reconciliation continuously shifts between the identities of victims and victors. As a result the identity of the post-war Sri Lankan nation-state is constantly in flux and therefore never forms.³⁰ This also has implications for the President himself who discursively styles himself as the protector and enforcer of justice for all victims

³⁰ This is suggestive of Julia Kristeva's understanding of abjection "subjectivity never stabilizes... Unconscious material is not stored away, but hovers on the very fringes of the subject's self-definition. This definition in turn is not complete. A defensive position is taken up, but not one that produces a subjectivity rigorously and completely separated from the world around it" (Mansfield 2000: 81).

of the LTTE. In the absence of an Other that can replace the LTTE, the President still requires the LTTE to maintain his status as protector.

Therefore, the President has no option but to maintain and negotiate a balance between the presence and the absence of the LTTE. In this context the identities of victors, victims and perpetrators are important frameworks for negotiating and shaping this balance between promise and reality. This leaves President with only one option — to keep affirming the continued need for protection of groups that have been and could be victimised by the LTTE in the future while at the same time celebrating the complete decimation of the LTTE and thereby affirming the impossibility of this very future. As a result, in Sri Lanka's post-war reconciliation discourse it is clear that the identities of the victors, victims and perpetrators that have been constructed are intermeshed in a symbiotic and cyclical relationship that depend on each other for their sustenance and furtherance.

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Much of the focus and discussion on reconciliation in Sri Lanka both internationally and locally has tended to centre around the work and findings of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). However, many analysts have pointed out that Sri Lanka's trajectory towards reconciliation after nearly three decades of war appears to be moving rather slowly. In seeking answers to this dilemma this paper turns away from the LLRC and instead analyses the post-war discourse of Mahinda Rajapaksa, the President of Sri Lanka in order to understand the concerns and dynamics shaping Sri Lanka's post-war reconciliation agenda. This paper uses two texts or utterances by President Rajapaksa — his speech to Parliament on 19 May 2009 announcing the end of the war and the President's election manifesto (Mahinda Chintanaya 2010: Vision for the Future) for the 2010 Presidential Election as the basis of its analysis. The President's discourse is analysed through the intersections and negotiations between the identities of perpetrator, victim and victor. The paper finds that the President constructs the LTTE as the sole perpetrator of the conflict in Sri Lanka but discursively constructs the possibility of three victims — the collective body, the Tamils as special victims and the Sinhalese as the real victims of the LTTE. These constructions intersect with the construction of the State as a helpless/weak/magnanimous victor which achieved victory in the face of incredible odds. However, these identities are premised on the need to affirm the possibility as well as the impossibility of the presence of the LTTE in post-war Sri Lanka. As a result I argue that Sri Lanka's post-war reconciliation agenda reflects the inherent contradictions of representing these opposing positions and identities simultaneously.

Andi Schubert is the founder and coordinator of the Young Researchers' Collective, an initiative working to mentor and support the research and development of young researchers in Sri Lanka. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Kelaniya in 2010. His research interests are interdisciplinary and deeply rooted in cultural studies and critical discourse analysis. He is particularly interested in the analysis of discourses of identity and how it impacts on and influences attempts at reconciliation in post-war countries.

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