

Schubert, Andi
The Young Researchers' Collective, Sri Lanka

Paper: Transformability

Reconciling the voices of the Ravanayana: Experiences of war and sustainable reconciliation in Sri Lanka

This paper explores the articulation of experiences of war and the role it plays in building a sustainable reconciliation process in post-war Sri Lanka.

In seeking to come to terms with the legacy of this violence, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive process through which the experiences and memories of war can be articulated in order to sustain attempts to transform Sri Lanka's history of fractured ethnic relations and reduce the potential for further conflict in the future (Hayner, 2001). This study seeks to encourage the development of such a process by examining the complex relationship between memory and the ascribing of legitimacy to these experiences of war.

This inter-disciplinary (drawing on memory studies, political science and cultural studies), insider research uses a theoretical framework of voices and silences to examine and explore the relationship and functioning of personal experiences of the war in Sri Lanka. The data for this study was collected just prior to the end of the war through five oral history interviews collected between March and April 2009.

The findings show that the war has established a complex hierarchy of experience, and that it is through this hierarchy that personal experiences of the war are narrated and legitimized. However, due to this, many survivors chose to silence their experience as they believed that their experiences were not valid or legitimate. Therefore, I argue that prior to establishing a process for articulating experiences of war, there is a need for the establishment and acceptance of a new matrix of legitimacy that can empower survivors to broaden their varying perspectives of experience.

References:

Hayner, P. B. (2001). *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*. New York & London: Routledge.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, Ethnic conflict, Reconciliation, Memory, Oral history