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Reconciliation as a moral issue

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1. Introduction

The period between 1983 and 2009 witnessed Sri Lanka entangled in a civil war that marred the public life with terror, violence, death and destruction. In 2009, peace was restored following Sri Lanka government’s victory over the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). Since then reconciliation has been a contentious topic in the public discourse of the country. While some discussions occurring on public platforms and in mass media seem to be following an “experts speak to the masses” model, the most of the public’s participation in the debate through the internet and SNS appears explicitly shaped by non-reflective, ethno-centric perspectives. Not only the substance of various reconciliation or non-reconciliation stances but also the processes, assumptions and conventions by which reconciliation is discussed promote populist and ethno-nationalistic agendas, upholding simplistic views instead of holistic visions, thereby further undermining the peace process, reconciliation, ethnic harmony and a lasting resolution to the national question.

This paper aims to defend the relevance of reconciliation for the post-war period and the future of Sri Lanka by reviewing lessons learned or not learned in some international conflict areas. A major part of the review deals with Japan’s reconciliation efforts towards the U.S.A. and some Asian countries, South Korea in particular. Then, the issue of national reconciliation in Taiwan will be briefly examined. Finally, I will show how and why Sri Lanka’s reconciliation project remains stalled, contrary to popular rhetoric, and will try to suggest how to overcome the hurdles. My implication in this review is that reconciliation must be followed as a moral obligation not only in Sri Lanka but in any country involved in armed conflict.

2. Japan’s postwar reconciliation with other countries

While Japan has succeeded in reconciling with the United States and European countries, reconciliation with China, South Korea and some other countries remains problematic. I will review some prominent aspects of Japan’s retrospective path with particular emphasis on the U.S.A and South Korea.

2.1. Japan’s reflections on the past

The war’s 70th anniversary compelled Japan to consult informed opinions regarding the past in order to take a realistic approach to the future. In 2016 February, the government set up the Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan’s Role and the World Order in the 21st Century to provide information and materials for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to draft a planned statement marking the 70th
anniversary of the end of World War II.

Reviewing Japan’s path after the 1931 Manchurian Incident, the final report of the panel clearly said that Japan “lost sight of the global trends and caused much harm to various countries, largely in Asia, through a reckless war.” While the report said that the war was Japan’s “aggression”, on the other hand, it highly evaluated the country’s postwar development based on reflections on its wartime actions. In evaluating Japan’s reconciliation with the relevant countries, the panel maintained that the nation’s reconciliation and relationships with China and South Korea have not improved compared with the United States and European countries. Taking a balanced approach and making a realistic assessment, the report says, “It is still difficult to conclude that full reconciliation has been achieved with respect to World War II, and there are still people in the United States, Australia and Europe, who think that Japan has not yet apologized sufficiently.”

One of the most controversial issues that arose during the discussion sessions of the panel centered around the question whether Japan’s actions during the World War II should be considered as “aggression”. The final report concluded that it should be considered “aggression”, though the opinion seemed divided. Another major focus in discussions on the statement to be issued by Prime Minister Abe was on whether to include the word “apology” regarding the war. While many observers were anticipating keenly for the word in the upcoming statement, some experts, even some senior officials at the U.S. State Department, opined that it was not necessary to use the word “apology”.

Shinichi Kitaoka who had served as acting chair of the panel had expressed his opinions in a separate article he contributed to The Yomiuri Shimbun in which he elaborated on some of these controversial issues. He mentions of four key words that news media have focused on in seeking whether Prime Minister Abe would refer to them: invasion, colonial rule, reflection and apology. The four concepts can be reduced into two sets of issues: invasion and colonial rule together constitute the issue of historical perceptions whereas reflection and apology together refer to the issue of responsibility for the former. To understand the issues of historical perceptions, we should look at the proper contexts in which given things have taken place. As for the issue of responsibility, those who committed wrongdoings or crimes should be held to account while others, witnesses or members of the next generation, would perform acts of reflection, rather than an apology. Whether reflection or apology, its purpose being reconciliation, the truth should be established and shared by both sides, and a proper understanding of modern and contemporary history would be the foundation therein.

A perusal of the 70th anniversary statement issued by Prime Minister Abe on 14th August of 2015 reveals how he has struggled to tackle the issue of historical perceptions tactfully, while focusing on the lessons learned from the past. Though he did not touch the controversial areas, such as Japan’s acts and some incidents which took place in China and South Korea in particular, he looked backed on the road to the war, pledged that Japan would never repeat those mistakes and tried to project a positive image of Japan emphasizing its future role in the world. When comes to the issue of responsibility, however, far from seeming hard-nosed and realistic, he suddenly appears beside the point, if not immoral. The commitment has always been evasive and partial: reflection part has been done but apology part missing. He is, however, following what the panelists advocated: An apology by one side will not realize reconciliation as it has two sides.
Prime Minister Abe has repeatedly revealed his stance towards an apology. Japan’s postwar cabinets have constantly embraced a feeling of apology. This feeling was passed on in the statements issued by Prime ministers Tomiichi Murayama and Junichiro Koizumi. All subsequent cabinets need not carry on this statement each time the cabinet changes. Moreover, the children of the future should not bear the fate of having to continue apologizing though we should continue to modestly listen to the voice of history.

Making an evaluation of the 70 years of reconciliation with China, the panel report said that though both countries showed their attitudes toward reconciliation, their intentions fail to coincide fully. As for the reconciliation with South Korea, it admitted that there are differences between the two countries over issues relating to historical perceptions, including the so-called comfort women issue. In short, reconciliation with China and South Korea has yet to be achieved fully. Before introducing some concrete examples illustrating the situation, I will evaluate how Japan’s reconciliation with the United States has progressed in a remarkable pace.

2.2. Reconciliation between Japan and the U.S.A.

Japan-US relations reached a climax when U.S. President Barack Obama made a historic visit to Hiroshima in May, 2016. It was historic because it was the first visit to Hiroshima by a sitting President from the U.S.A. The visit itself was a statement because of its symbolic value. By the visit, it was intended to acknowledge how destructive nuclear weapons were and would be and to respect all of the victims of the war, Japanese, Americans and of other origins as well. Hiroshima has been not just a story of tragedy but also an inspirational story of survival, resilience and reconciliation. The visit showed to the world how two countries that were bitter enemies 70 years ago could grow as the closest of friends in a few decades.

Obama’s visit to Hiroshima is important to the whole world because in his 2009 speech in Prague Obama had referred to the United States’ “moral responsibility” as the only nation that has used nuclear weapons in the history of the world. It is important to note, in this context, that former U.S. President Harry Truman, who made the decision to drop atomic bombs towards the end of World WarII, had said that the bombing was necessary for bringing an end to the war. Going on a reverse path, Obama made his speech in Hiroshima using the words “humanity” and “moral” many times. The world news media, including CNN and BBC, reported the event emphasizing that the word “apology” was not used in the speech. However, many observers pointed out that the Japanese people, either the government or the people, were not seeking an apology. What was more important to them was the presence of the President in Hiroshima, his words, his gesture and the relations between the two countries. Many people in both U.S.A. and Japan seemed to believe that Obama showed his humility, braveness and dignity through his meeting with hibakusha atomic bomb survivors.

After Obama’s visit to Hiroshima, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to Pearl Harbor was discussed and organized as the final stage of Japan-U.S. reconciliation. In December, 2016, Pearl Harbor marked the 75th anniversary of a surprise attack by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Along with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pearl Harbor occupies a significant place in Japan-U.S. history. Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 sank and damaged eight U.S. battleships, including the USS Arizona. The U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt described the day of the attack as “a date which will live in infamy” in a speech given at a joint session of the Senate and the House of Representatives the day after the attack. It is
also said that Americans fought the war with the words “Remember Pearl Harbor” engraved in their minds as the constant refrain.

Abe’s intention of Pearl Harbor visit was reported as respecting war dead and consoling the souls of the victims and to mark a clear end of an unfortunate period in Japan-U.S. history. As such, he would not use a direct expression of apology, as Obama did in Hiroshima. Hawaii, where Pearl Harbor is located, has a large community of Japanese Americans who account for about 20 percents of its population. As Hawaii Governor David Ige, a second generation Japanese-American, put it, “what is important is to make it an occasion for reconciliation between the two countries for their future, without being bound by anyone’s specific speeches or assertions.” In Obama’s words, “This historic visit will stand as a tribute to the power of reconciliation and to the truth that the United States and Japan, bound by an alliance unimaginable 75 years ago, will continue to work hand-in-hand for a more peaceful and secure world.”

It was a historic moment because Japanese and U.S. leaders visited Pearl Harbor together for the first time to offer their condolences. The U.S. government had invited veterans and survivors of Japan’s Pearl Harbor attack to the memorial ceremony. Their attendance could be very powerful, in a way similar to the presence of hibakusha atomic bomb survivors in the Hiroshima event which Obama attended in May, as a senior administration official of the U.S. government said in a press conference held before Abe’s visit. He further remarked that the overriding theme of the event was reconciliation. All this shows that Abe’s visit to Pearl Harbor together with U.S. President Barack Obama marked a highly visible symbolic stage of the strong alliance built between the two countries.

In his 17-minute speech, Abe used the word “reconciliation” six times and “tolerance” seven times. For instance, he said “What has bonded us together is the power of reconciliation, made possible through the spirit of tolerance.” The first part of his speech was dedicated to the offering condolences. Then he emphasized, “We must never repeat the horrors of war again. This is the solemn vow we, the people of Japan, have taken.” Abe sang hosannas to American people for their tolerance. He added servility to the hosannas by referring to the Japanese Imperial Navy officer, Fusata Iida, who died at the attack and for whose name U.S. servicemen erected a memorial marker, and further quoting Ambrose Bierce’s famous poem “The brave respect the brave”. He appreciated the goodwill and assistance extended by American people to Japanese people to rise up from abject poverty to prosperity. He also quoted Abram Lincoln’s words “With malice toward none, with charity for all …” perhaps to expel ill-feelings lingering in the U.S. society toward the Pearl Harbor attack.

Obama had arranged his speech at Pearl Harbor to synchronize with the ideas and feelings expressed by Abe. Regarding the alliance, he said, “In good time and bad times, we are there for each other” and referring to its wider extension and strength, he stated, “The alliance stands as the cornerstone of peace in the Asia Pacific.”

While the U.S. media gave a positive evaluation about Japanese Prime Minister’s remarks and many Japanese war survivors hailed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to Pearl Harbor, some questioned the lack of an apology or mention of the state’s responsibility for pursuing war. Kunihiko Sakuma (72), head of the Hiroshima chapter of the Japan Confederation of A-and H-bomb Sufferers Organizations, said, “He should have apologized for Japan pulling the trigger of war. Only then would we be able to call it future-oriented.” Yoshiro Yamawaki, 82, who has been sharing his accounts of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in English, said Abe is covering up facts using “pretty words,” adding Pearl Harbor “should be remembered as a

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symbol of Japan starting a reckless war.”

2.3. Japan’s reconciliation with Asian countries

In this section, I will demonstrate how international perspectives regard Japan’s reconciliation with Asian countries as problematic. Recently, 53 eminent US and Japanese people, including US filmmaker Oliver Stone and University of Tokyo professor Tetsuya Takahashi, sent an open letter to Abe asking whether he planned to pay tribute to victims of Japan's wartime aggression in other nations. In their open letter sent to the Prime Minister before his Pearl Harbor visit, they asked for an explanation of the government policy with respect to historical perceptions, Abe’s viewpoint of World War II, in particular, and also about difference between Japan’s war against the U.S. and the war against China. It should also be noted that writing an open letter to Abe last year, more than 200 Western scholars, including Ezra Vogel of Harvard University, had urged him to face squarely Japan's wartime past. This is the problem with Abe's perspective of war and the past. He hails relations with the U.S.A. but doesn’t deal with Asia openly. Mr. Abe repeatedly emphasizes that he is the first Japanese prime minister born after the war, the implication being that war guilt is a relic of a bygone age.

A Chinese critic has been straightforward, putting the problem at the forefront. “While Abe tried to tell the world on Tuesday to not mention the infamous part of Japan's history, many Chinese are waiting to see whether he visits the Nanjing Massacre Museum to offer both "everlasting condolences" he mentioned on Tuesday at Pearl Harbor and a sincere apology. It is puzzling why it is so hard for Abe to just say the word "apologize" to seek the forgiveness of nations and people that were victims of Japanese atrocities. This is even more surprising when one considers Germany's postwar reconciliation with other nations (Chen Weihua, 2016).

China criticized Prime Minister Abe's visit to Pearl Harbor in strong words. Hua Chunying, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, told a press conference in Beijing, “Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is on a trip to Pearl Harbor but has no plan to apologize for the World War II surprise attack that killed 2,400 Americans, should sincerely reflect on his country's war crimes rather than just "put on a show." The spokeswoman said, “Reconciliation between the inflictors and victims must and can only be based upon sincere reflection and apology from the inflictors.”

In the same way, a South Korean Foreign Ministry official, touching on Abe’s remarks in his speech at Pearl Harbor, said that Japan, based on a correct understanding of history, should strive further to promote reconciliation and cooperation with neighbors that fell victim to its wartime militarism. It is evident that Asian countries have been watching keenly how the acts recently taken by the Prime minister, including the enactment of national security laws and publishing by his party a draft constitution glossing over Japan’s military atrocities at the war, contradict his pledge to keep Japan a peaceful nation.

Official displays of reverence at the shrines of the war dead with the blessings of military-patriotic ideology continue to inflame opinion in neighboring countries that suffered under Japan’s militaristic rule. Exacerbating the situation, Defense Minister Tomomi Inada visited Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on 27th Thursday in December 2016. Tomomi Inada was one of the two cabinet ministers Prime Minister Shinzo Abe accompanied to his historic visit to Pearl Harbor, the other member being Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida. This indicates that Inada visited the shrine on her second day after returning from Hawaii. She
not only participated in a ritual called “tamagushi” but also entered her name and the title of Defense Minister in a visitors’ book. Though she said after the visit, “I offered prayers in the hope of adopting a future-oriented viewpoint and firmly building peace in Japan and the world,” it is not clear how a visit to a militaristic-nationalist shrine evoking the memories of the wartime past can enhance a ‘future-oriented’ or ‘peace building’ project.

In fact, visits to the infamous shrine by Japanese leaders and officials have sparked strong criticism from China and South Korea, which were both victims of Japanese invasion in WWII. Soon, on the day Inada visited the shrine, China and South Korea lodged protests against her visit. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying, addressing a press conference in Beijing said that Inada’s visit to the shrine, which glorifies Japan’s wartime history of invasions, reflects a stubborn and wrong view of history by some Japanese people. A Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Japan will win trust from neighboring nations and the international community only when its leaders face up to history correctly and express true remorse through actions.

U.S. officials also reacted negatively to the Japanese defense minister’s visit to the shrine. U.S. State Department spokesperson Anna Richey-Allen told Seoul-based Yonhap News Agency that the U.S. has continuously emphasized the importance of “healing and reconciliation” when it comes to issues of Japan’s past militarism. According to a report by Kyodo News, a U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it is regrettable that Inada visited the shrine shortly after returning from Hawaii, where she accompanied Abe who offered condolences to those who died in the 1941 Japanese surprise attack there. Another State Department spokesperson, indirectly criticizing Inada’s visit to Yasukuni shrine, told Kyodo News, “We continue to emphasize the importance of approaching historical legacy issues in a manner that promotes healing and reconciliation.”

2.4. Japan’s reconciliation with South Korea

At the end of 2015, global media outlets reported that South Korea and Japan reached a landmark agreement to resolve their dispute over Korean women who were forced to serve as sex slaves for Japan’s Imperial Army. The agreement, in which Japan made an apology and promised a one-billion yen ($9.8 million) payment that would provide care for the women, was intended to remove one of the most intractable logjams in relations between South Korea and Japan. The so-called comfort women have been the most painful legacy of Japan’s colonial rule of Korea, which lasted from 1910 until Japan’s defeat in 1945. The Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers, announcing the agreement in Seoul, said that they considered it a “final and irreversible resolution” of the issue.

Public opinion surveys conducted in South Korea, however, have revealed that many people are dissatisfied with the deal. One of the main reasons for this is that people think “opinions of former comfort women were not listened to.” A support group for former comfort women said that the deal betrayed the South Korean people. Hundreds of South Korean protesters joined with two surviving former comfort women to denounce the deal on 30th December, 2015. A spokesperson of the U.S. State Department, expressed his hopes that the deal “will promote healing and reconciliation between the two countries.”

Many observers, however, believe that Japan struck the deal with South Korea merely to satisfy the U.S demand.
As part of the deal, South Korea had recognized Japan’s concerns over the statue of a girl symbolizing comfort women erected in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul and promised to make efforts to resolve the issue in an “appropriate” manner through negotiations with the relevant organizations. However, South Korean civic groups have expressed strong opposition to the removal of the statue. An official of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan says “Even discussing the relocation of the statue is humiliating and an unauthorized act that violates public rights.”

Meanwhile, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which examined issues related to discrimination against women in Japan, including the comfort women issue, released a report on 7th May, 2016 expressing regrets and saying that many problems remained "unresolved" regarding the so-called comfort women issue. The report criticized the bilateral deal for its act confirming that the comfort women issue is “resolved finally and irreversibly”, indicating that the deal “did not fully adopt a victim-centered approach.” Based on this assumption, the report urged Japan to ensure that the implementation of the deal take due account of the views of the former comfort women. The report further advised state leaders and officials to refrain from making statements that would re-traumatize former comfort women and to “provide full and effective redress and reparation, including compensation, satisfaction, official apologies and rehabilitative services.” The South Korean government refuted the report saying that the report’s view is unacceptable while Japanese government criticized the report calling it extremely regrettable. But to an unbiased estimator, it is evident that the report not only offers independent and impartial advice but also suggests some important hints about how a genuine reconciliation process should be conducted.

There is evidence to prove that the bilateral deal was signed before reaching a consensus regarding some crucial issues. In February 2016, Japan’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Shinsuke Sugiyama, told a UN panel in Geneva that there was no evidence of Japanese military or government involvement in procuring the women. According to the Yonhap news agency, a South Korean Foreign Ministry official said Japan should “refrain from words and deeds to damage the spirit and purpose” of the December agreement. The Japanese government has been continuing to deny that the comfort women were forcibly taken away against their will, even after reaching the deal. The South Korean government, on the other hand, has been insisting that the coerciveness is a historical fact clearly accepted by the international community. A question arises: why does the South Korean government not criticize the Japanese government over the issue? Because it cannot do so since there is a clause in the bilateral deal to the effect that each country refrain from blaming or criticizing each other over the issue in international platforms such as U.N. meetings.

In another controversial case, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein referred to the comfort women as “the women who survived sexual slavery by the Japanese military forces during World War II” when addressing a U.N. Human Rights Council meeting held in Geneva on March 10, 2016. Japanese representative for the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Geneva hitting back immediately said that the term “sexual slavery” contradicts the facts.
While controversial issues remained unsolved, a foundation named as the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation was established by the South Korean government on July 27, 2016 to support former comfort women based on the bilateral deal. The Japanese government was preparing to disburse the pledged 1 billion yen (US$ 9.8 million) to the foundation for making payments to support former comfort women. The news media reported that the both governments have entered a new phase to materialize the “final and irreversible resolution” of the comfort women issue as stipulated in the accord.

In another development, in a meeting held in the Laotian capital of Vientiane on 7th September, 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Park Geun-hye agreed to steadily implement the bilateral deal and to strengthen cooperation. During the meeting, Abe asked for “continued efforts toward the steady implementation of the deal, including the statue issue.” Park, however, indicated to Abe that domestic conditions are not yet conducive to removing the statue. According to the results of opinion surveys in South Korea, about 80 percent of people oppose relocating the statue. Making the matter worse, a new statue of a girl symbolizing comfort women was set up by several civic groups in front of the Japanese Consulate General in Busan on 30th December, 2016. The statue is the second of its kind placed in front of a Japanese diplomatic mission in South Korea.

The establishment of this kind of statues or monuments has spread beyond South Korea, to some other countries. The legislative body of San Francisco voted for a resolution urging the city to establish a memorial for comfort women in September 2015. The resolution noted that several U.S. cities, such as Glendale and Rohnert Park in California and Long Island in New York, have already erected such memorials to help remember comfort women. A group of Korean-Americans unveiled a girl statue at a ceremony held in a Washington park on 10 December, 2016. The statue which was created in South Korea is considered a replica of the statue established in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

A ceremony to unveil the “Place for Memory of Comfort Women” was held at Mount Namsan in Seoul, South Korea on 29th August, 2016. 29th August is considered as the ‘day of humiliation for the country’ because on that day in 1910 the Japanese government declared Korea being annexed to Japan. Meanwhile, a Taiwanese women’s rights group set up a museum to display comfort women-related documents and promote education to prevent sexual violence in Taipei on 10th December, 2016. It is Taiwan’s first museum dedicated to comfort women. In another case, it was reported that an organization of various citizens’ groups from countries including Japan, China and South Korea applied to UNESCO a total of 2,744 documents and other materials related to comfort women to add to its Memory of the World Register, though they are yet to be registered.

All this indicates that the whole point about comfort women is appealing to a sense of justice, to ethics of apology and the universal value of reconciliation. David Tolbert, President of the International Center for Transitional Justice, has pointed out that the comfort women issue implies some important questions about apologies for crimes and serious human rights violations during armed conflict (Tolbert, 2016). As Tolbert’s views are well-balanced and highly convincing, I will summarize below the points made by him.

Through his 15 year-experience of working in the field, he affirms that many victims feel that an apology unaccompanied by other forms of reparation does not constitute justice; even as material reparations, such as compensation, without a meaningful acknowledgement of responsibility, an apology...
also falls short. The graveness of the situation is also non-negligible: (1) In terms of volume, an estimated 200,000 women in Asia were forced into sexual slavery (2) As for systematic manipulation, Japan systematically established an extensive network of “comfort stations” throughout its occupied territories (3) Many of these “comfort women” were barely teenagers when they were enslaved. In spite of this graveness, though various expressions of regret and statements acknowledging were made, none has expressed an unconditional acknowledgment that Japan as a state was responsible for these violations.

The bilateral agreement offers a “heartfelt apology and remorse” but only for the “involvement of Japanese military authorities” in forcing South Korean women into sexual slavery. According to survivors and their advocates, this falls well short of a complete and meaningful apology, because it does not recognize Japan’s role in establishing and maintaining the system of sexual slavery. It does not accept legal responsibility for the violations, either. As the ICTJ report points out, apologies for massive and systematic war crimes and human rights violations should come as a result of consultations with survivors and victims’ families about the form, content and timing of an apology that would be most meaningful for them. This was not the case for Japan and South Korea’s “comfort women” survivors. The report emphasizes that apologies should neither end truth-seeking, nor stifle truth telling by victims. An apology should open up space for accountability rather than close it.

This series of records of incidents, episodes, expressions, statements and reports vividly tells the story of Japan’s failed reconciliation with South Korea, suggests how reconciliation ought to be and depicts how collective memories affect people’s minds as well as diplomatic and political relations.

3. National reconciliation in Taiwan

After examining how Japan’s reconciliation remains unfulfilled and, moreover, muddled up with uninitiated commissions and intentional omissions, now let us turn to another country, Taiwan, to see how its national reconciliation is still caught in the grips of political conservatism and autocracy.

The 228 Incident, which is traced back to an era called White Terror era beginning from February 27, 1947, refers to an uprising against the then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration, which triggered the killings of tens of thousands of Taiwanese and led to nearly four decades of martial law. The 228 refers to February 28 in 1947. February 28 was designated as a national holiday in 1996 by the then-President Lee Teng-hui, though it remains controversial among some KMT members who oppose its designation as an official holiday. Two decades have passed since President Lee made the first official apology on behalf of the government to the survivors and families of the victims, but there are no open discussions or revelations about the Incident, as to who was truly responsible and the extent of the massacre. While some sporadic attempts to uncover the truth are often labeled as ulterior motives of stirring up ethnic tensions, any attempts by researchers to examine documents from the era are barred from bureaucratic red tape.

Every year two memorial services are held on the same day at the 228 Peace Memorial Park located in the capital city of Taiwan to commemorate the anniversary of the Incident. Holding two separate ceremonies indicates the extent of divide that still exists between the two sides — the Chinese Nationalist Party and Mainlanders on one side and descendents of early Chinese settlers and aboriginal inhabitants of Taiwan on the other — and also shows how deep the wounds of the Incident remain. Although there
are many events held throughout the country around the anniversary day to honor those who were killed, tortured and imprisoned during the White Terror era, some other efforts to investigate, reveal and explain the Incident have fallen victim to partisan politics.

Although academics, including historians, and most of the victims’ families maintain that Chiang Kai-shek should be held responsible for the massacre and as well as decades-long White terror era, the government leaders seem to believe otherwise. To most nationalists, Chiang Kai-shek remains an honorable national leader. Chiang’s tomb maintained by government funds sits graciously being visited officially and respected by government leaders each year, on the anniversary of his death. His statues decorate parks and university campuses across the nation. His portrait can be seen on the nation’s coins and banknotes. All these signs and symbols demonstrate that the government has not admitted to the mistakes of the past. News paper editorials point out that it is time to end servile worship of Chiang Kai-shek and recognize victims who were wrongfully killed and jailed and further urge “those who bravely took up arms to fight against the dictatorship of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) at the time should be honored as heroes.”

As researchers describe, the 228 Incident has many facets making it highly complicated occurrence. Evidently being a historical tragedy brought out as a by-product of a clash of different ethnicities, it was essentially a massacre of civilians by the KMT government (Chen Yi-shen, 2015). The traditional KMT definition of the Incident has been that it was a revolt sparked by communists and hence the military intervention was necessary to maintain stability of Taiwanese society. Deviating from this interpretation, President Ma as chairperson of KMT attempted to define the Incident in 2006 as a case of the government forcing citizens into revolt, rather than being an offshoot of ethnic differences. However, it was the fact that the KMT government officials commonly called waishengren were unable to understand the local ethnic groups plus the rampant corruption of KMT officials that mainly caused the Incident, according to the sources (Chen Yi-shen, 2015).

Many of Chiang Kai-shek’s statues and busts at campuses across the nation are vandalized every year with eggs, paint or banners with the word ‘murderer’ written on them on the eve of the Incident anniversary. Some statues have been removed starting from 1999. Daxi District, home to the mausoleums of Chiang Kai-shek accepted approximately 200 statues to remove, beginning in 2000. In 2007, greater publicity was given to the removal of statues under pro-Taiwan Independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)-led government initiatives. By 2015, the Tainan City Government was considering to establish a task force to remove Chiang’s statues from local school campuses. These incidents show how Taiwan confronts her history in a belated and undignified manner.

The protest movements organized by activists to coincide with 228 Memorial Day every year have been reminding Taiwan of its history and demanding the authorities to facilitate transitional justice. Unless the government takes steps to investigate the Incident and the subsequent tragedy, reveal the truth and address the grievances of the victims’ families, there will be no possibility of true reconciliation over the tragedy.

4. National reconciliation in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s civil war came to an end in 2009. Though eight years have passed since then, the larger questions that led to the carnage still remain unanswered. The end of the war, the celebrations that
followed, the general attitudes towards the end of the war and the later developments clearly show how the people of the country remain volatile, being fractured and polarized along ethno-religious lines and how the governments lacking in clear policies and overwhelmed by waves of populism continue to be indecisive and ineffectual.

4.1. Ethnic Divide

The problem of competing nationalisms has been challenging the successive governments, leaving no ground for adopting an Ostrichian principle and denying the existence of ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. All the Presidential Elections, General Elections and local government elections held in the Northern Province during the last decade have shown the results with unaltered voting patterns widely differing from the southern constituencies and manifestly shaped by the ethnic divide between the north and the south. Polarization can be seen in war commemoration events, too. In the south, it is the war hero commemoration, if not victory celebration, that has been on focus whereas the Tamil community in the north wants to pay homage to the dead civilians and militant victims. Further, since the southern constituencies do not form a monolithic unit, there is unabated polarization within the south itself regarding devolution of power, constitution amendment and the manner in which the conflict and post-conflict problems are perceived, which has been further delaying the process of reconciliation.

A detailed UN report compiled by the UN Human Rights Commissioner’s office with the title Report of OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL) has revealed how war crimes, crimes against humanity and human rights violations were perpetrated during the 2002 – 2009 period in general and the final phase of the war in particular. Both the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE have been accused of alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and human rights violations. Whereas the cruel treatment of Tamil civilians by the LTTE has been documented to a great extent, the blame has been apportioned to both sides, though not perhaps equally.

Many incidents revealing how the LTTE forcibly prevented the Tamil civilians from leaving the war zone, virtually holding them as hostages, and how they oppressed and persecuted Tamil civilians in the name of Tamil liberation have been recorded. There have also been recorded cases of blatant misuse of powers occurring without any consideration for people’s sensitivities as well as any respect for the basic human need of security of life and property. When the LTTE was administering their territory, they unilaterally decided to expel the Muslim community from the North, implementing a large scale ethnic cleansing project, discriminating against Sinhala and Muslim communities by invalidating their eligibility for local government positions, redrawing boundaries between the Muslim and Tamil villages and renaming Muslim villages in a way that would reflect a Tamil ethno-linguistic character.

Even after the release of the OISL report, divisive nationalist forces on both sides have been obsessively focusing on the danger of international intervention or inflated accounts of genocide, instead of encouraging a process of introspection leading to truth-seeking. Both Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianists increasingly motivated by a persecution complex and Tamil nationalists stuck in a minority-majoritarian mindset have been acting as divisive forces creating spaces for hate mongering and incitement to violence without any regard for the genuine concerns of the people. The mainstream leaders of the both sides have failed to bring the message of national unity to their respective communities enabling them think over the
past experiences and omissions of collective responsibility.

The power centers both in center and the periphery seem to believe that a devolution package with constitutional amendments built upon the 13th amendment will lead to national reconciliation. In fact, such reforms are needed for strengthening key public institutions such as the parliament, the judiciary, the police and other law enforcement agencies, as the failure of public institutions and their negative impact have been permeating through the whole public life and individual lives in the country. Admittedly, building a judicial process that ensures accountability for crimes, bringing devolution and institutional reforms that enable the transition from militarization to civilian control and taking remedial action and necessary interventions that can develop an environment of trust and reconciliation among different communities will be important national priorities for both the government and the civil society.

Unfortunately, some important reforms, though originated with good intentions, remain stalled due to many reasons, such as difficulty in consensus building and failing to meet the basic human needs and aspirations, redress the grievances of the victims’ families and heal the wounds of survivors. The Office of Missing Persons established by the government is said to exist only on paper. Dissatisfaction is brewing in the North over the slow pace of post war reconciliation mechanisms. It is sad that the central government and provincial administrations have done little to address disputes arising from competing claims made by Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities over agrarian land and fishing waters in some parts of the Northern and Eastern provinces, which allows chauvinistic forces to exploit such situations to reinforce the ethnic divisions. However, the government and law enforcement authorities don’t seem to be paying adequate attention to dismantle potential flashpoints and reduce ethnic tensions. The government, thus, has been unable to create a new reflective space with the purpose of building a resilient culture in which future generations can live with dignity and self-respect as equal citizens of Sri Lanka.

4.2. Transitional Justice for post-conflict peace building

The way out of this quagmire can be found through the notion of Transitive Justice. Let us look at this notion briefly. Based on the principle that human rights violations cannot be ignored, the term has gained a new meaning. “Transitional justice is rooted in accountability and redress for victims. It recognizes their dignity as citizens and as human beings. Ignoring massive abuses is an easy way out but it destroys the values on which any decent society can be built. Transitional justice asks the most difficult questions imaginable about law and politics. By putting victims and their dignity first it signals the way forward for a renewed commitment to make sure ordinary citizens are safe in their own countries – safe from the abuses of their own authorities and effectively protected from violations by others.”

The principle that works here can be delineated by applying four different approaches:

• Criminal prosecutions for at least the most responsible for the most serious crimes
• “Truth-seeking” (or fact-finding) processes into human rights violations by non-judicial bodies
• Reparations for human rights violations taking a variety of forms: individual, collective, material and symbolic
• Reforms of laws and institutions including the police, judiciary, military and military intelligence

Legal experts on Transitional Justice have already described what TJ means, how it would contribute to national reconciliation and how it can be applied in Sri Lanka context, etc. Accordingly, Transitional
Justice can be considered as a holistic concept which includes truth seeking, reparations and institutional reforms. Seeking truth is never a simplified, unilateral activity as there are many truths, many perspectives and many stories arising from, and belonging to, not only Sinhalas but also Tamils and Muslims. That is why we need to create pathways for reconciliation through Transitional Justice.

A well-balanced comment made by a critique regarding the post-war situation in Sri Lanka has some important implications for achieving transitional justice. In this essay, Sivamohan Sumathy has suggested a three part program of action for possible political operations which might be a good foundation and solid process for reaching a common understanding (Sumathy, 2015).

1. We the people need to know what happened during the war. We want a reliable and participatory accounting of it.
2. Development of mechanisms of reparation for those who had been suffering in silence and in deprivation and the development of specific judicial mechanisms in attending to the state’s and non state’s actors’ culpability in their treatment of the people during and after the war.
3. A reconstructive process and a political process leading to a solution put forward without delay for the north and east and for other parts of the country; foregrounding peoples’ welfare and interests.

It would be interesting to note that the three-part program suggested by Sivamohan Sumathy covers three of the four basic approaches adopted under the notion of Transitional Justice. What is left out is the feature of criminal prosecutions which probably is the most controversial part of the process. This would be compatible with the recommendation that it is very important to think creatively and innovatively about the established ways of addressing massive violations of human rights and achieving Transitional Justice. As the proponents of this instruction point out, the political, social and legal conditions in a country will dictate what kinds of things can be done when.

The Consultations Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms (CTF) appointed by the Prime Minister in January 2016, after conducting public consultations on the design of the reconciliation mechanisms, submitted its interim report to the government in January 2017. The preliminary report takes the establishment of the Office on Missing Persons as a matter of priority and aims to inform the government of Sri Lanka and the public about the consultations and the issues of the missing and the disappeared. In addition, the CTF had sought submissions on alternative suggestions related to the four pillars of Transitional Justice. However, an opinion leader has lamented that the government leaders or the mainstream mass media have shown little interest in the report just released.

4.3. Interethnic dialogue for consensus building

As proven by the range of international experiences we have observed, failure in reaching a national and social consensus of the root causes of a conflict, the wounds inflicted as well as injustice yet prevailing impedes the process and progress of reconciliation. In Sri Lanka any collective effort or a consensual approach toward a proper evaluation of the root causes that have led to the inter-ethnic tension, conflict and suspicion which is prevailing even today is yet to emerge.

We cannot see any public forum in which political or opinion leaders from different ethnic communities meet and talk face-to-face, discussing their problems, genuine grievances and legitimate
rights. While many Tamil leaders repeatedly complain that the government ignores the aspirations and legitimate rights of Tamil people, some opinion leaders of the Sinhala community ask them to define the aspirations and legitimate rights in concrete terms clarifying the specifics as to the content and character of Tamil peoples’ grievances. Unfortunately, with Tamil leaders declining or, seemingly, reluctant to offer to respond to such queries, the questions from the opinion leaders of the opposite side often go unanswered. If people on the other side of the divide understand that the grievances of the opposite side are genuine and the rights they are demanding are legitimate, their stances will soften, reducing the gap between the ‘we’/‘they’ communities and relieving the tense atmosphere. The biggest problem for the progress of reconciliation is that there has not been a constructive dialogue between the ethnic communities.

Even some sporadic discussions initiated through the mass media have not led to any tangible course of action that brings about enduring peace and reconciliation. As a rare, laudable attempt made by a group of civic society, a message entitled as ‘An appeal to the Tamil Community and its civil and political representatives’ appeared in The Island newspaper on 6 January, 2012. The letter gracefully asked the Tamil community to remember the plight of the forcibly evicted Muslim community in the North during the period of the LTTE rule. In response to this letter, a group of 20 eminent persons from the Sinhala Community wrote a letter with the title “An appeal to the Sinhala Community” which appeared on The Island on 16 January 2012. This exchange of ideas by two groups of opinion leaders representing the Tamil Community and Sinhala Community seemed to be the most hopeful attempt towards interethnic communication, national integration and reconciliation made through the civic society since the end of the armed conflict. Though the conversation offered words of hope and optimism for the future of the peace process, it never continued to make any progress, let alone develop as a fruitful dialogue between the communities. The dream of achieving amity and reconciliation must have been more powerful than any pressure to cease and desist. Inaction in the face of multiculturalism is perhaps the biggest challenge Sri Lanka faces with mutual understanding and communal harmony.

4.4. Cultural collaboration for breaking the deadlock

It will be instructive, in this connection, to observe the recommendations made by the LLRC Report which strongly advocated that the removal of the feeling of discrimination is a prerequisite for reconciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamils within a united Sri Lanka. The Commission had also recommended that the government should have a proactive policy to encourage mixed schools serving children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. For inculcating mutual understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural diversity of different communities in the minds of school children and youth as a necessary condition for the process of reconciliation to take firm root in the social fabric of the country, the Commission had recommended that every encouragement be given to create greater interaction among students, through mechanisms such as twinning of schools from the different provinces, student exchange programs and formation of Reconciliation Clubs in schools.

It is also admitted that school level activities can play a great role in promoting trust building and social cohesion between different ethnic and religious communities. The Unit of Social Cohesion and Peace Education in the Ministry of Education has been working proactively to achieve this goal. Denuwara Mithuro (Pals of Two Cities) started in 2007 and several student exchange programs allow students from
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Tamil speaking areas and students from Sinhala speaking areas to get together participating in friendship development programs. One program worth mentioning is the Project for Rebuilding of the Elephant Pass Railway Station. The rebuilding of the station in the war-devastated area in the north was designed as a gift from the students of the south to the students of the north, in which students in the south were asked to contribute Rs.2 each to fulfill this task and the response was tremendous and the project was successful. 28

Our education and cultural learning has a great role to play to achieve reconciliation through conflict resolution in long-term basis. Archeologist like Senaka Bandaranaike and Sudarshan Seneviratne have enunciated the value of cultural interaction as a component of in-built systems devised for conflict resolution in the South Asian context. It will be relevant here to make a brief reproduction of some views given in a lecture titled “Shared cultures and heritage for conflict resolution: A south Asia perspective” by Professor Sudarshan Seneviratne. As people construct their cultures in interaction with one another, cultures and their associated societies cannot be isolated within a prism of exclusivity. Heritage is to be understood as an area of refinement and as a multi-faceted catalyst. It is also viewed as a source of people-to-people connectivity in conflict resolution and as an idiom that expresses the common language of humanity where people reach out to each other for understanding, sharing and coexistence (Seneviratne, 2012).

However, Sri Lanka is yet to make good use of shared cultures and cultural heritage with the focus on combining education, communal harmony and reconciliation. The most immediate incident that comes to my mind is a trivial conflict that occurred in the University of Jaffna between two groups of students in July last year and exploited by the extremist politicians and the media outlets to inflame public feeling. The row had allegedly taken place during a ceremony organized to welcome new students to the university’s science faculty. While one group of students, i.e. from the Sinhala community, suggested that a Sinhala traditional Kandyan dance be performed, the other group, i.e. from the Tamil community, counteracting the proposal, insisted on the performance of Tamil traditional dance. On the day of the welcome event, as it turned out to be a violent confrontation, the university was temporarily closed and Sinhala students had to be evacuated from the university and Jaffna as a safety measure.

One may see the conflict as resulting from a ‘cultural assertion’ of the Tamil students against the ‘cultural intrusion’ of the Sinhala students. Another critical observation was made by Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council, Sri Lanka: “In a context in which Tamil grievances have included the sense of their traditional areas of inhabitation being changed by state-sponsored colonization, it is necessary to adopt a more low key approach to highlighting Sinhalese cultural symbols in Tamil dominant areas.” The whole incident shows that culture can be a sensitive area in a multi-ethnic environment and remains a flashpoint for conflict between the Sinhala people and the Tamil people. The incident further reflects both local grievances of the students and the wider problem centered round how people are sensitive to any change in the demographic pattern of the region, as illustrated by the concern expressed by the Northern Provincial Council that the influx of Sinhala students into Jaffna University is akin to cultural colonization.

5. Conclusion

The cases of international experience, souring relations between Japan and South Korea in particular, and the events of the recent past in Sri Lanka, all laden with the issues of historical perceptions and assuming or evading responsibilities, convince us that people and communities who have been affected
by past events and attitudes that have been ingrained into their hearts, minds and brains incessantly seek remedies and vehemently stand for dignity and respect. Accommodating such human needs, feelings, wishes and rights is an essential component of reconciliation. As humans, we are bound to respect the inherent dignity of each other. This also implies that demanding rights without fulfilling the duty of respecting the fundamental rights of others is egotistic and does not help create a fairer, more egalitarian society.

Much attention must be paid to informative and persuasive communication. It is important to shape public opinion, bringing it home to opinion leaders that reconciliation does not undermine a sense of national community and belonging; it can strengthen the sense of national community and belonging. In this context, it is also necessary to “frame” the issue of reconciliation in a way that people see reconciliation, apology and forgiveness, healing of wounds and memories and ensuring social justice as necessary conditions for living peacefully with neighbors.

Only constructive dialogue will open the path for exploring a cooperative approach. Just talking in terms of “Who is the inflictor?” and “Who is the victim?” will not suffice. With some flexibility on both sides, it should be possible to reach an acceptable compromise leading to consensus. Instead of apparently expecting to see the conflict played out repeatedly in the future, engaging in dialogue on the basis of respect for other communities will be the best option for any country or community. The greatest challenge is how to disarm our defenses rather than walling ourselves up.

Notes
1 Some social critiques believe that there doesn’t exist an ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, hence no need for reconciliation. See Amarasekara (2015): “With the defeat of terrorism, and the paradigm shift that ensued, we of the Patriotic National Movement believed that no reconciliatory measures are required any longer.”
2 See for the excerpts from the report The Japan News by the Yomiuri Shimbun, August 7, 2017.
3 The Japan News, June 8, 2015
5 From the Q & A session between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the media, August 15, 2015
6 The Japan News, May 28, 2016
7 The Japan News, September 5, 2016
8 Jiji Press, December 9, 2006
9 U. S. Department of State, December 21, 2016 (https://fpc.state.gov/265933.htm)
10 The Japan Times, December 28, 2016
11 Kyodo News, December 30, 2016
12 Kyodo News, December 26, 2016
13 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-12/29/content_27809959.htm
14 Kyodo News, December 28, 2016
15 Kyodo News, December 30, 2016
16 The Japan News, December 31, 2015
17 The Japan times, September 3, 2016
18 The Japan News, March 13, 2016
During the Chinese civil war periods, there was a massive wave of political migrants out of mainland China. Those who sought refuge in Taiwan with the KMT came to be known as the “Mainlanders” or “waishengren” (Chinese: 外省人) and were distinguished from native Taiwanese or “benshengren” (本省人).


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要約
スリランカの内戦が終結を迎えてから7年以上経っているが、民族融和のあり方についての議論が分かれている。和解の名の下で国家の主権を譲るべきではないという議論と和解の過程が遅れているという不満の声が白熱している。この論文は、過去の国際紛争・戦争、国内紛争の地域では和解政策がどのように進められてきたか、あるいは進められてこなかったかを振り返り、和解の人道的必要性を擁護する。まず、日本の米国との和解、そしてアジア諸国、特に韓国との和解の状況を注意深く再検討した。次に、台湾の228事件のことを簡潔に再吟味した。最後に、スリランカの和解案がどのように進んでいないままにあるのかを検討し、よりよい和解政策へと生かしていくためのヒントを与える。つまり、人々の心の面の平和構築が必須であることを訴える。

キーワード：reconciliation, apology, memory, Transitional Justice, victim-centered approach, dialogue