"The Thirst of Tamils is the Homeland of Tamil Eelam": Methodology as a Form of Repatriation

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Abstract
This research article seeks to introduce readers to my dissertation’s methodology, where I conceptualize and apply methodology as a form of repatriation in my research project. I do this by first setting the stage of my dissertation, explaining my influences for this methodology of repatriation, breaking down key components of this methodology in relation to my work, and lastly, demonstrating the intent and importance of methodology of repatriation throughout this critically reflexive note. The purpose of this piece is to expand our methodological imaginations as qualitative researchers and to showcase the beginnings of how our personal and political positionalities, theories, and ethics can be beautifully weaved to create research methodologies for healing – and even repatriation. Besides, being able to reimagine academic research methodology – with its roots in harmful Eurocentric, colonial institutions – is itself a form of repatriation.

Keywords
action research, community based research, emancipatory research, ethical inquiry, participatory action research, social justice, feminist research

Background
How do we inherit the pain of events we have not experienced ourselves? How can we heal and put an end to our inter-generational trauma? The conflicts and environmental changes of the early 21st century have created a crisis of forced migration, with 82.4 million people displaced worldwide and one person newly displaced every three seconds (UNHCR, 2020). Canada has been instrumental in offering refugees the possibility of a better life. However, in many cases, displaced persons bring with them traumas that affect their future generations (George, 2010). This is true of the Tamil communities in Canada, most of whom fled a brutal 26-year-long
armed conflict in Sri Lanka only to now struggle with spiking suicide rates among their youth in recent years (Shanmuganandapala, 2020). Though unreported in the news, these suicides trigger memories of a dark past and resurface in embodied historical trauma. Toronto is now home to the largest Tamil population outside of Sri Lanka, with an estimated 200,000 Tamils living in Canada (Statistics, 2017). There is limited knowledge about embodied historical trauma in Canadian refugee families, with gaps in insight particularly about intergenerational trauma (Flanagan et al., 2020; Sangalang and Vang, 2017).

Motivated by the desire and commitment to reduce the suffering of Indigenous peoples and influenced by the importance of the past in shaping present reality, Marie Yellow Horse Brave Heart developed the theoretical construct of “historical trauma”. This construct aims to situate Indigenous health issues as forms of postcolonial suffering and legitimize the problematizing of structural issues in its ongoing contributions to communities’ trauma (Kirmayer et al., 2014). Brave Heart, through her personal and professional experiences, respectively a member of the Indigenous community and a social worker, shares that she experienced a powerful consciousness of carrying ‘old’ grief and trauma greater than herself, her family, and her whole tribal community (Brave Heart, 1998). Over the past two decades, this theory has garnered widespread attention in the context of Indigenous populations and Holocaust survivors & their descendants (Thambinathan, 2021). It captures previously missed elements around group identity, genocidal intent, collective impact, individual and communal experiences, as well as the intergenerational nature of trauma. Here, historical trauma is applied to Tamils who fled Sri Lanka, yet this methodology has broad implications for forcibly displaced populations fleeing war and genocide. Historical trauma and its relationship to care and healing is left to clinicians’ individual interpretation; moreover, trauma and healing are often explored without engaging communities with lived experiences, leading to siloed and unreliable findings with low applicability (McGregor, 2021; Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010). It is therefore important to better understand the persistent effects of historical trauma because there is no point saving parents from war and deprivation in their home country if their children are left to struggle in their new home to the extent that they take their own lives.

My research examines the historical trauma and resiliency of 2nd and 3rd -generation Tamil refugee young adults in Toronto, focusing on three areas: pain, postmemory, and porattam* (*transl: revolutionary struggle). Rooted in Indigenous research, this project employs a multilayered theory of ‘historical trauma’, amalgamated by two pre-existing constructs: historical oppression and psychological trauma (Brave Heart, 1998). Aligned with my commitment to adopt methodology as a form of repatriation in this work, my en-grained values of social emancipation and solidarity with the oppressed position this project within a strong decolonizing theoretical framework. As repatriation and decolonization go hand in hand, my project necessitates certain principles within its research design: (1) exercising critical reflexivity; (2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination; (3) embracing Other(ed) ways of knowing; and (4) embodying a transformative praxis (Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). Jointly in ownership and collaboration with Tamil refugee young adults in Ontario, my research seeks to: 1) co-create knowledge about resilience and embodied historical trauma, as well as its potential transmission across generations, 2) prioritize community healing in this project by exploring healing practices within the community, and 3) theorize how socio-politico-cultural environments and related structural factors may contribute to the manifestation and reproduction of embodied historical trauma and sense of ‘porattam’ in Tamil refugee young adults. These tangible goals stem from identifying gaps in community mental health through intimate conversations within my Tamil community. With this contextual foundation in place, this manuscript will explore how methodological imaginations within this research project can create transformative spaces for healing and repatriation.

**History of ‘Eelam’: The Makings of a Genocidal State & Canada’s Tamil Diaspora**

In the 1940s and 1950s, before the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, the first Tamils arrived in Canada seeking better employment and education. Primarily made up of people on student visas, these few individuals were wealthy, educated, and Westernized (Yogarajah, 2020). However, as of 1983, there was a shift in this narrative; Tamil refugees began fleeing during and after the Black July of 1983 in Sri Lanka. Black July, the state-sponsored anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983, came to be known as the defining historical event that prompted the armed conflict, as it caused extreme anti-Tamil violence in the form of mass killings, rape, and destroying Tamil homes and businesses (Gunasingam, 2014). The total damage caused to commercial and residential property were estimated to be $140-180 million, about 4% of the country’s GDP (Eleanor, 2008). Other than being Tamil, asylum seekers arriving in Canada had more in common: they were of higher caste and class. Owing to the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board’s sympathy towards their plight (as noted by an above-average asylum claim acceptance rate of 85% between 1989 and 1998) and the third wave of Tamil migrants in the 1990s attributable to Canada’s refugee family reunification program (Wayland, 2003), Toronto is now home to the largest Sri Lankan Tamil population outside of the homeland. According to the 2016 Canadian Census, the total population of those who chose either “Sri Lankan” or “Tamil” as their ethnic origin is 201,265 (Statistics, 2017), but this number lowballs the population since it excludes Tamils who are hesitant to identify themselves, whether that is because they are undocumented and/or fearful of disclosing their identity (Amarasingam, 2013).
Following the 9/11 attacks and the infamous ‘war on terror’, Tamil refugees were seen as a national security threat and no longer wholeheartedly welcomed in Canada (Philipupillai, 2013).

The Tamil genocide haunts the everyday lives of Toronto’s Tamil community. 13 years ago, during the peak of the genocide known as the Mullivaaikal Massacre, our desperate cries for help from the international community were met with deafening silence (Tamil Guardian, 2022). We will never forget feeling betrayed and brutally reminded that to the Canadian government, our lives back home were not recognized as worth fighting for. Ever since, external instances of state oppression and racism, both back in our homeland of Sri Lanka and in our displaced diaspora ‘home’ of Canada, have the potential to trigger and re-traumatize us as a community. These experiences shape how we feel, cope, and remember. They mould our very existence as Tamil diaspora residing in South Asia, due to the signiﬁcant number of Tamil-speaking people concentrated within the nearby state of Tamil Nadu in South India (Gunasingam, 1999). The Tamil and Sinhalese people have a millennia-old presence on the island but are preceded by the original inhabitants of the island – the Indigenous Veddah population. In the lead up to Ceylon gaining its independence and turning into ‘Sri Lanka’, the island’s various ethnic communities resisted power-sharing agreements and pursued their own nationalistic agenda (Dix & Pollock, 2019). Post-independence, the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority formed the Sri Lankan government. As disastrous by-products of colonial rule, the newly anointed Sinhale rulers defaulted to the colonial strategy of imperialism and domination; Tamils were viewed as a permanent threat, thus at-

Eelam is the native Tamil name for the island of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a small tropical island state in South Asia, located in the Indian Ocean just off the south-east coast of India. Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country with a population of 21 million, of which the ethnically Sinhalese community make up 75%. The Sinhalese people, who are predominately Buddhist, speak a language only spoken in Sri Lanka called Sinhala. Although the Sinhalese people are the majority on the island, they tend to see themselves as a minority within the larger South Asian sphere, due to the significant number of Tamil-speaking people concentrated within the nearby state of Tamil Nadu in South India (Gunasingam, 1999). The Tamil and Sinhalese people have a millennia-old presence on the island but are preceded by the original inhabitants of the island – the Indigenous Veddah population. In the lead up to Ceylon gaining its independence and turning into ‘Sri Lanka’, the island’s various ethnic communities resisted power-sharing agreements and pursued their own nationalistic agenda (Dix & Pollock, 2019). Post-independence, the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority formed the Sri Lankan government. As disastrous by-products of colonial rule, the newly anointed Sinhale rulers defaulted to the colonial strategy of imperialism and domination; Tamils were viewed as a permanent threat, thus attempts were made to brand them as parasites (Gunasingam, 1999). Overall, after independence, the nation showcased a trend of “growing fundamentalism and an increasingly reactionary bond of religion, ethnicity, and state power” (Hillier, 2019, p.23). State-sponsored discrimination against Tamils began from this point forward. In 1948, the Ceylon Citizenship Act was passed to deny Indian Tamils citizenship. By rendering this population stateless, the Sri Lankan government was able to significantly reduce the Tamil population and break any possibility of a shared Tamil-speaking united front between Eelam Tamils and Hill Country Tamils (Shastri, 1999). In 1956, the second prime minister of Sri Lanka imposed the Sinhala Only Act, establishing Sinhala as the country’s only offiicial language; in 1971, the Policy of Standardization required Tamil students to score higher than their Sinhalese peers to qualify for university admissions; and in 1979, the government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act, allowing the detainment of people without a warrant – predominately used against Tamils (Gunasingam, 1999). The armed conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government lasted an overwhelmingly painful 26 years, from 1983-2009, ending with the government’s defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). During the last phase of the war in 2009, 100,000s of Tamil civilians were lured into ‘No Fire Zones’, tiny patches of land that were 14 square kilometres in size and trapped under fire by the government (Boyle, 2010). Aid agencies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations were told by the government to evacuate the island; every hospital in the war zone was repeatedly attacked; and civilian lands turned into graveyards (Boyle, 2010). In response to this massacre, a pivotal moment for many Toronto Tamils, in terms of both diaspora identity formation and community mobilization, was the 2009 Gardiner Expressway protest (Guyot, 2017). Toronto Tamils could no longer sit at home waiting for change, so they took to the streets on Mother’s Day of 2009; specifically, over 2000 Tamils walked out on the Gardiner Expressway and brought traffic to a standstill. In October 2009 and August 2010, the Ocean Lady and MV Sun Sea – two ships carrying 568 Tamil refugees fleeing genocide – landed on the coast of British Columbia. Stirring up contentious national debate about existing refugee and immigration policy in Canada, there were 248 total articles covering the Sun Sea incident (Boyd, 2012). The Canadian government decided to detain all the passengers and then chose to either accept them as refugees, deport, or charge with human smuggling (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2015).

Since the war, the Sri Lankan government hides under the disguise of reconciliation, though those who committed war crimes and contributed to the Tamil genocide have not yet been held accountable; questions around thousands who have been forcibly disappeared by the government have not been answered (Sri Lanka, 2020); and state-sponsored Sinhalisation and militarisation of Tamil-speaking regions in the North East have been revived (People for Equality and Relief in Lanka, 2016).

Let’s Talk Methodology

Methodology is a tapestry of epistemology, ontology, axiology, ethic, politic, method(s), theory of change, and stance that internally guides a research project. The pattern of the tapestry helps to determine the way in which a project unfolds, what we see as the start or end of a project, who is our audience, who is our “us”, how we think things are known and how others can or need to be convinced. The methodology operationalizes the
ethical stance of the project, what is considered data, what constitutes evidence, how a finding is identified, and what is made public and kept private or sacred. (Tuck, 2011)

This methodology article is heavily inspired and influenced by Dr. Eve Tuck, an Indigenous scholar and associate professor of critical race and Indigenous studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Over the past few years, I have been closely following Dr. Tuck’s work, especially because she has conducted participatory action research with youth and is an activist first, then a scholar – an identity I can relate to. Dr. Tuck is also the first to coin the term ‘methodology of repatriation’ and utilize it in her research (Tuck, 2011). I have borrowed this term as a representation of my methodology and adapted it to my research project as I see fit, building on by incorporating elements from theories that reinforce my ‘version’ of repatriation.

**What is Repatriation?**

Repatriation is the process of restoring or returning to the homeland. This may refer to recovering stolen ancestral lands; reclaiming cultural rights, theories, and epistemologies; and restoring sovereignty. Tuck defines repatriation as what “the colonized do to recover ourselves, our land, and our culture, whether or not the colonizer is ready to apologize. It commands an acknowledgement that would not otherwise come” (Tuck, 2011). I view repatriation as a pathway of healing, justice, and liberation. Repatriation is the response to the rage, fire, and thirst I feel when I hear Tamils back home describe the country they live in, along with frustrated Tamil diaspora when they learn they cannot do much to help the situation back home.

“‘They’ve erased us and are celebrating.’ (Amparai)
“How can we not remember them?” (Mullaitivu)
“They’ve destroyed all our monuments. We want them rebuilt.” (Kilinochchi)
How do you memorialize the disappeared? (Kilinochchi)
“Now, we stay at home and cry.” (Kilinochchi)
“They’ve built army camps where our kin are buried, walking on their graves.” (Kilinochchi)

Quotes above were retrieved from PEARL’s 2016 Memorialization Report, from conversations between PEARL researchers and Tamil individuals affected by the armed conflict in the North-East of Sri Lanka. The village/district names are listed in brackets. These words still resonate deeply today, as the contentious issue of memorialization is no different 6 years later, in 2022.

Having grown up in a safe haven in Toronto yet living through the peak of the armed conflict and 2009 Mullivaikkal Genocide, it is hard to explain how I feel. I was not old enough then to understand completely. I remember feeling confused and sad. No one is listening! The Canadian government is not responding to us, but we are out here standing in the cold and protesting. However, following those years, I committed myself to learning more and becoming more involved politically with my community. I then realized that all along, I was expecting a saviour to rescue us, whether that be the United Nations or the Canadian government. I was naïve but also helpless. Now, I am hopeful. My hope is revolutionary in the sense that it lives and grows within my community. My hope is not dependent on the elite or those in charge; my hope rests upon us. We, as the youth, will dream and imagine an Eelam free from oppression and will achieve liberation on our own terms. In a way, metaphorically, this research is another step of my own repatriation process – I am returning to my homeland, restoring my ancestors’ visions, and reclaiming my evolved identity. At the same time, repatriation quite literally has a place in my work, where Tamil refugee youth discuss their intergenerational trauma, activism, and resilience and return ‘home’ to recover their memories and postmemories.

**Methodology as a Form of Repatriation**

Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. (Hooks, 1991, p. 1, p. 1)

The way Hooks describes her journey to theory is how I myself have come to this methodology of repatriation, which builds on participatory action research, decolonizing methodologies, theories from liberation psychology that are generative to this work, Tamil rituals/ceremonies as knowledge and connection, the creation of research ethics that centres humanity and values relationships, actively committing to leveraging knowledge from oppressed castes and genders (women, non-binary, transgender), and an overall praxis that revolves around achieving justice and self-determination for Tamils. For far too long, as an early researcher-in-formation, I was troubled by limiting myself to pre-existing, Western-centric, narrowly defined methodologies that didn’t fully encompass how I perceived my methodology. Here, I take a leap of faith to highlight my version of this methodology of repatriation, inspired by Dr. Eve Tuck. My methodology of repatriation is “the theoretical backbone and ethical compass of this work” (Tuck, 2011, p. 25). Essentially, it is a reflection of my worldview as an Eelam Tamil activist-scholar, participatory action researcher, community educator, mental health advocate, mentor, and creative; this is how I view, approach, and conduct research.
Key Components

In this section, I give an overview of what this methodology looks like in my work, what theories/methodologies it carries in its core, and how it is operationalized. I outline the many elements that weave together to create my methodology of repatriation. I view this methodological research design as the intersection of theory, practice, and ethics. Borrowing from McGregor et al. (2018), this stems from an interest and commitment in keeping theory close throughout the research design; what matters are the intersections and relationships among the theoretical framework, application of methodology, adherence to ethical principles, and research findings & mobilization (McGregor et al., 2018). I adopt Participatory Action Research (PAR) as my methodology because it embodies central tenets of equitable participation and social transformation (Fine & Barreras, 2001). PAR de-centres the researcher as the most active participant; community members with lived experience of the study topics become co-researchers. PAR is a sustainable community-driven approach to traditional research that explores deep-rooted issues and enacts change by addressing the forces that inform injustices. McTaggart (1989) outlined 16 tenets of PAR: an active approach to improving social practice through change; congruence on authentic participation; collaboration; establishing self-critical communities; and involving people in theorizing about their practices. In addition, PAR requires that people put the practices, ideas, and assumptions about institutions to the test, involves record-keeping, requires participants to objectify their own experiences, involves making critical analysis, and is a political process (Baum et al., 2006). Very much aligned with my decolonizing theoretical framework, PAR almost seamlessly weaves into my research methodology. Community members are included as co-researchers in all phases of the research process as means to explore issues that matter to them and enact social transformation through addressing contextual forces creating situations of injustices. PAR goes beyond understanding and raising awareness of a social problem to taking steps towards addressing social change/ transformation (Fine & Barreras, 2001).

My Positioning: The Ever-Shifting Status Between Insider & Outsider

The role of being an insider or outsider within qualitative research has become a contentious issue. First, it was seen that an outsider position – someone who does not share the same knowledge, value, and attitudes of the community of interest – had a superior, objective view of realities compared to an insider. Insiders held membership with the community, while outsiders were exactly that: outsiders (Gair, 2012). Over time, this perception has been altered especially in participatory action research, where researching without collaborating with the community is almost unimaginable. I am someone who locates themselves within the critical transformative paradigm, which recognizes that realities are constructed and shaped by social, historical, political, cultural, economic, and racial values (Mertens, 2007). Privilege and power are central in framing realities within this paradigm, making it ideal for use within research addressing societal inequalities and injustice. Additionally, this ‘methodology as repatriation’ concept could only be operationalized within a paradigm that seeks to push societal limits and challenge colonial roots. Thus, with all this in mind, it is innately imperative that the research I ‘do’ is with the community of interest, in every sense of the word.

There is no question that I am an insider within my community. I myself am a second-generation Tamil refugee; my father claimed asylum at the border of Canada-USA and my mother got sponsored through a spousal/girlfriend visa. I have experiences related to pain, postmemory, and porattam. I feel the pain of experiences that I myself have not experienced first-hand. I ‘check off’ definitions of an insider, by being a part of the group, but also being socialized inside the Tamil community in Toronto (taking part in classes, activities, and spaces that were inherently Tamil). I do not wish to evaluate how ‘Tamil’ someone is by such criteria, but recognize that the literature makes an observation that being an insider means not having high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider culture (Xu, 2017). My ever-shifting status between insider and outsider is visibly demonstrated throughout this piece. Sometimes I write ‘my community’ and other times, I refer to ‘the community’. Though this act is relatively subconscious, I am very much consciously aware that the shift between insider and outsider happens automatically inside me, much like code-switching. Code-switching is a kind of behaviour adjustment of one’s style, speech, appearance, behaviour, and expression in ways that may increase chances for fair treatment, ‘good’ perception, and higher opportunities (McCluney et al., 2017). My subconscious and conscious experiences with code-switching within the academy go deeper in that they not only hide outward appearance traits, but also repress certain ideologies that cannot be talked about in the open. My professional interests make me an outsider. To some in my community, I am viewed as a traitor – someone who once was committed to the struggle on the ground but now has bought into the ‘ivory tower’ dream because she believes the power is not held by the people, but with the elite. I disagree with this sentiment but at the same time, I am committed to being critically reflexive throughout my research project, and this has led me to the decision of incorporating formal, established community collaborative models to my research: a community advisory committee & two peer researchers. Both of these models will solely be comprised of peer researchers, second or third generation Tamil refugee youth living in Toronto. With that being said, to assume that these models would remove any power relations between myself as the researcher and my community is ignorable. This, like any other research process, requires critical reflexivity, transparency, and commitment to...
my defined ethics. Thus, in the continuum of positionality in participatory action research, I identify myself as an ever-evolving insider and outsider, whose purpose and commitment first and foremost belongs with the Eelam Tamil community.

**Decolonial and Feminist Ethics**

Informed by a decolonizing theoretical framework and the methodology I have developed merging feminist and liberation-centred perspectives, the ethics of this study takes a feminist, non-Western-centric approach, where human relationships, participants’ welfare, and respect to self-determination are prioritized first before all else. Moreover, decolonial and feminist ethics addresses: the relationship between the creation of knowledge and the exercise of power; hierarchical power relations between researchers and participants in the research process, and the context in which the research is conducted (Ackerly & True, 2008). This comprehensive ethics outlook tends to many issues, including the politics of location, interpretation, representation, and publication.

Decolonial and feminist ethics in this research comprise of the following elements below, compiled by me to incorporate my merging practice of ethics and also selectively include elements from literature (Brugge & Kole, 2003; Denzin & Giardina, 2016; Preissle & Han, 2007).

1. Respect for sovereignty.
2. Genuine reciprocity with obligations centred around community, instead of individual.
3. Engagement with positionality and critical reflexivity.
4. Commitment to centre counter-narratives; challenging dominant epistemologies.
5. Prioritize strength-based research processes, rather than pathologizing or patronizing participants.
6. Exercise a praxis of compassion and care.
7. Explicitly recognize Eelam Tamil knowledge systems, rituals and ceremonies as legitimate knowledge and connection to land, legacy, & heritage.
8. Accountability to the impacts of my research process (emotional & physical harm, etc.) and how participants are presented in my research.
9. Responsibility to ensuring the transformation/action element of PAR is carried out in this study.
10. Duty to accurately and empathetically present memories and postmemories.
11. Integrity to my character as an Eelam Tamil activist first, then scholar.

The above practice of ethics translates to the overall maintenance of shared values with my participants to amplify Tamil counter-narratives and the disruption of Western research ethics when it goes against centring humanity, valuing participant relationships, and working towards achieving justice and self-determination for Tamils. *Liberation Psychology: Centring Healing and Justice When Researching Trauma*. It is traumatizing to talk about our trauma without centring the Tamil community’s healing and work for justice. I contend that individual wellness for members of the Tamil community requires adopting a methodology that embodies theories from liberation psychology that are generative to this work, one which “attends to issues of social justice, cultural context, action research and resistance; that necessitates the dismantling and healing of the source of societal wounds of oppression” (Bryant-Davis, 2007, p. 142). Widely known for his pioneering work in this field, Ignacio Martin-Baró is a Latin American social psychologist who was invested in critically approaching and embracing psychology as a collective tool to help people challenge and change systems of oppression (Martin-Baró, 1994). Emerging from the shortcomings of traditional Western psychology, such as prioritizing and valuing autonomy over interdependency, individual rather than the collective, and individual change over societal transformation, liberation psychology aims to encompass a theory and practice that pushes beyond complicity with the status quo (Mallona, 2014). Liberation psychology is best viewed as a paradigm and an orientation from which psychological practice and reflection can be conducted, in order to shift psychology to meet the needs of marginalized populations (Montero & Sonn, 2009). This paradigm, very much aligned with Paulo Freire’s emancipatory education work, ensures that communities are active participants in their processes towards liberation and healing, as their concerns, histories, and values are all centred within any psychological theory/practice (Mallona, 2014). This paradigm seamlessly flows with my values and thinking as a committed community-based participatory action researcher. However, without conscious unpacking and repositioning of trauma theories I intend to use, I cannot fully embody and apply this as part of my methodology. As Martin-Baró claims, “a psychology of liberation requires a prior liberation of psychology” (Martin-Baró, 1994 p. 32).

Theorizing trauma should go beyond victimization, merely recognizing resilience, and identifying injustice. It is not enough to hope for our survival; we must vow to continue our survivance. Indigenous scholar, Vizenor, expresses survivance as “a narrative resistance that creates a sense of presence over absence, nihility, and victimry” (Vizenor, 1994, p. 41). In psychological work, social consensus and reparation are necessary parallels in the journey to heal; the personal is always political and so, justice cannot be detached from healing. From the perspective of liberation psychologists, for change to occur, it is necessary to assume an explicitly political position when working in this paradigm, rejecting the approach of assuming ‘neutrality’, typically adopted in mainstream psychology (Malherbe, 2018). The starting point of liberation psychology is to stand in solidarity with oppressed peoples. Centring healing means to centre the community’s validation and recognition, putting their needs for solidarity and accountability before all other Western notions.
of therapy. We can draw from cultural beliefs, community rituals, and healing spiritual, ceremonial practices to provide an ‘ecology’ for the healing of HT. One Tamil psychiatrist, Daya Somasundaram, who extensively worked with populations in the North of Sri Lanka during and after the armed conflict, signified the healing effects of cultural rituals that have been traditionally used as coping strategies. These include funeral rites (anniversary observances), community grief performances, religious festivals (folk singing and dancing), which all aid continuity of culture, meaning, and hope; heal physical and psychological wounds; prove supportive spaces and communal participation; and lastly, solidify group identity and create a shared sense of belonging (Somasundaram, 2014).

In the context of my homeland, where the government solely pays lip service to reconciliation, researchers and psychologists must not fall trap to pushing forward ‘peace’ as a way to heal. This would directly oppose the epitome of liberation psychology.

As book series editor, Dr. Daniel J. Christie, states:

Liberation psychology also challenges theory and practice in peace psychology, much of which is comfortably organized around a corpus of literature on conflict management and resolution, approaches to human relations that can be powerful tools of the status quo, at times reducing tension in conflictual relationships, while leaving the social order uncontested. (Montero & Sonn, 2009, p. viii)

Though forgiveness is often centred in mainstream psychology, liberation psychology calls upon historical memory, collective action, and commemoration as key aspects of work to be done with communities (Burton, 2013). This may include producing and sharing testimonies, artistic methods of commemorating, and ensuring state-induced violence must never be forgotten. Not only does this highlight that psychologists and researchers play a legitimate role in the process for liberation, but it also points out the need to work ‘outwards’ in psychology as much as the discipline focuses on working ‘from within’ (Burton, 2013). It is my goal to engage in this collectivist approach towards justice and liberation, work in alliance with individuals on the ground, all with an emphasis on memory and commemoration to call out injustice and fight in the struggle against impunity for the Sri Lankan government.

Additionally, mental health professionals often engage in neoliberal social justice analyses when dealing with human suffering in complex geopolitical environments [e.g. Israel/Palestine or Sri Lanka/Tamil Eelam in this case] (Atallah, 2017). In such scenarios, Fassin & Gomme (2012) explains that there is a lot of risk when reducing violence to trauma and the subject to a victim. When the focus is entirely on dying and suffering, and there is a sort of singularity between everyone’s experiences – pain, lived experience, ‘trauma’ – within the conflict, the history once again is erased (Fassin & Gomme, 2012). This historical memory, as defined by Martin-Baró, is an act of recovering and returning to the homeland; thus it is key to my methodology of repatriation. Martin-Baró also saw a purpose in selectively uncovering elements from the past that opposed dominant narratives, as they were effective in defending the interests of exploited classes and helpful for their path towards liberation (Burton, 2013). Memory is a core political element of my research project, especially because Sri Lanka is a genocidal nation with an entrenched culture of impunity. For Tamils, the act of remembrance has always been an act of resistance. The architects of the genocide currently hold authoritarian power and get to decide what gets remembered both publicly and privately. For the survivors of human rights violations, mass atrocities, and political violence, as well as their loved ones, the past is always present. The legacy of the liberation movement is an important of Tamil identity, history, and healing; those who want to remember must be permitted to do so. Therefore, it is my project’s prerogative to take on this role of actively remembering and resisting as an act of recovering and returning to the homeland – an act of repatriation.

For me, as a researcher and Tamil community member, healing also means to write in my mother tongue. Only publishing in the English language would be engaging in elitist, casteist, racist discriminatory behaviour. “I knew whom I was writing about, but whom was I writing for?” (Wa Thiong’o, 1998). By acquiring the values and views of an adopted tongue, I fail to remember what this was all for. Without unlimited accessibility of my work to my community, what is the point of any of this? In addition, my desire to use arts-based research tools as a means of storytelling in my research was reinforced in embracing this methodology of repatriation. Art, being a universal language, holds the power to convey the silence, trauma, and survivance of my community. I have been granted the honour of mapping my community’s collective testimonies in this way. The bigger collective goal may also involve a knowledge mobilization piece to share with the larger community, a policy advocacy element to support ongoing movements, and/or a community healing space showcasing this art.

Lastly, as part of my methodology of repatriation, I must consider whether my research

“is a true ordering of our own priorities, as compared with the default order of the status quo. If it contains truth, he reminds us, it has permission to be more than a simple reflection of data; it can become an account of what needs to be done. It can seek to make a real contribution to human liberation.” (Martin-Baró, 1994)

The goal of this research article was to boldly encourage qualitative researchers to view methodology as an evolving and thriving backbone in our work. I call on qualitative researchers to make it their own, by being intentional in every stage of their research design, and not being afraid to combine the personal with the political. This piece showcases the beginnings of my methodology and how I strive to conceptualize and apply methodology as a form of repatriation in my
work. Besides, being able to reimagine academic research methodology – with its roots in harmful Eurocentric, colonial institutions – is itself a form of reparatiation.

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