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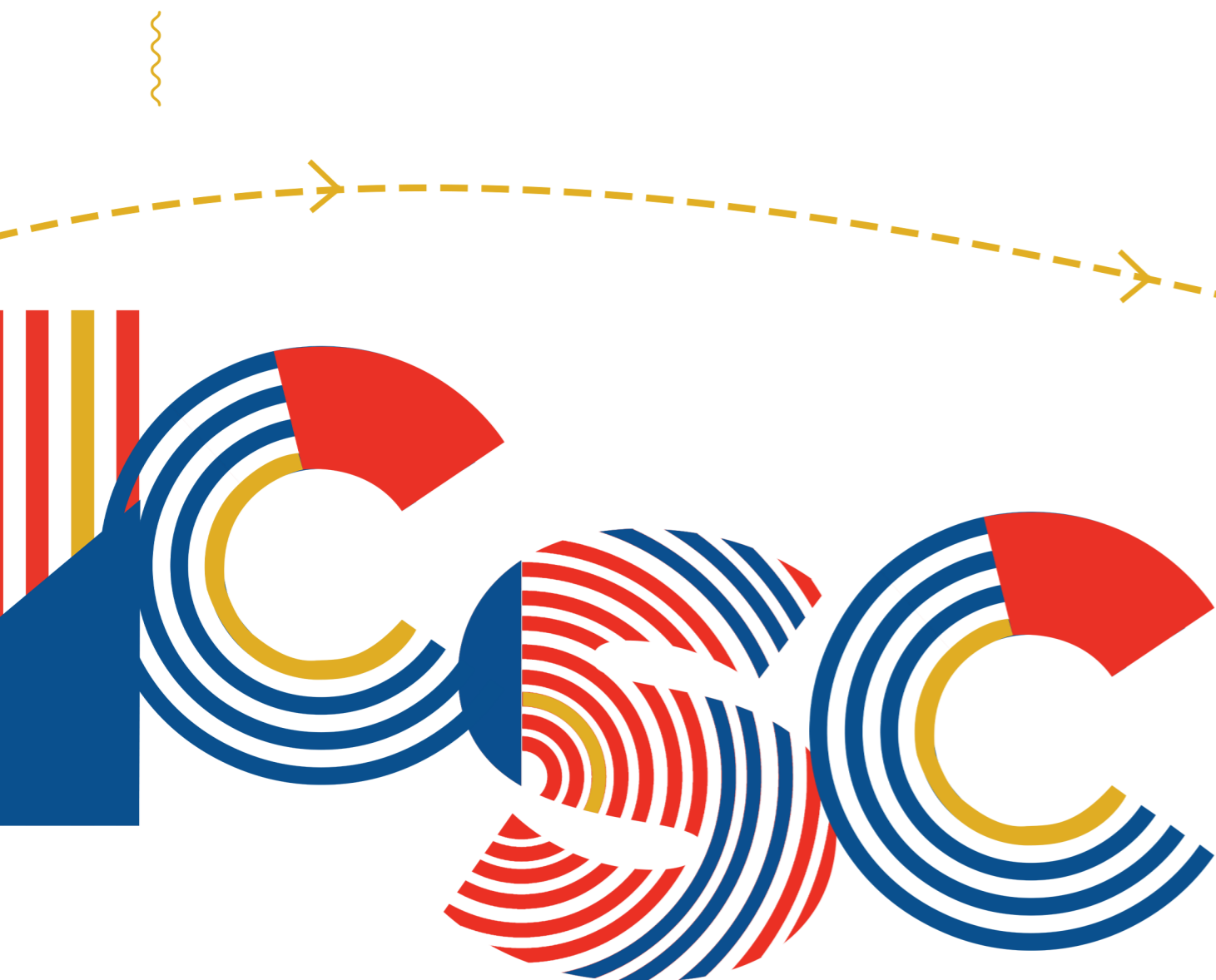
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S H A R E D J O U R N E Y S E X H I B I T I O N 2 0 2 1



**SHARED
JOURNEYS**
EXHIBITION
2021



Shared Journeys Exhibition 2021



Shared Journeys Exhibition 2021
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Curator's Note

History is often presented as a single narrative that unfolds on a linear path, from one event to another. Too often, these 'grand narratives' of history are shaped by entrenched ideologies, victors' perspectives, colonial legacies, patriarchal values and contested identities. They set aside or leave out entirely, the 'subaltern' - stories and lived experiences of those on the margins of history. 'Shared Journeys' exhibition aims to decolonise the mind and democratise the very notion of an exclusive history, by bringing to light hidden, marginalised or lost histories, and the stories of the people that have lived them.

The Shared Journeys exhibition includes the work of 12 member organisations of the Asian and Pacific Sites of Conscience Network, representing seven contexts. These are Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation, The Liberation War Museum from Bangladesh, The Peace Institute of Cambodia, Youth for Peace, Kdei Karuna from Cambodia, The Network of Families of the Disappeared and Voices of Women media from Nepal, The Herstories Project, International Centre for Ethnic Studies and The Institute of Social Development from Sri Lanka, The National Human Rights Museum of Taiwan and The Tibet Museum in India.

These exhibits speak of home, migration and exile; the dignity of life and the rights of minorities; the human cost of war and violence that still doesn't break the human spirit; enforced disappearances and the impact on those left behind; they restore identities and sometimes contest presumed identity; and search for truth and justice. But they also highlight humanity's connectedness - in our suffering and in our hope - that crosses many divides.

This exhibition serves to remind us that history is also perspective. These stories are not unique and their impact is not just localised to a specific country: They are histories of our world. They contribute new depth to our understanding of history and help us question commonly-held beliefs about what we think we know. Jointly taken, the Shared Journeys exhibition reminds us how dangerous a single narrative can be and that we must engage with uncomfortable histories and multiple truths in order to empathise, acknowledge, heal, memorialise and understand each other. They advocate for a more pluralistic historical narrative and to raise our voices to support each other in the pursuit of truth, justice and democracy.

Radhika Hettiarachchi
Curator



Afghanistan

Afghanistan

A history of violence dominates the narrative of Afghanistan. Its 'wars' have been glorified and its image as 'the graveyard of empires' has been reinforced over decades by scholars' orientalist points of view, interventionist powers that seek to control the region and the unyielding eye of the media. In their stories of fierce warring tribes, decades of intermittent war and the cruelty of the fundamentalists, the suffering of the ordinary people of Afghanistan as victims of acts of violence beyond their control, is rarely fully and publicly acknowledged. This exhibit of 'Memory Boxes' challenges the deep-seated culture of impunity and public amnesia of the impact of violence on civilian lives.

The Inheritance of Death

More than four decades of violence¹ and conflict have either killed or maimed hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians. While many Afghans feel a profound sense of victimhood and suffering as a consequence of these protracted wars, there has been little official effort to develop a policy of public memorialisation or remembrance of the lives shattered by the various cycles of armed conflict. The Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO) began an ambitious memorialisation project in 2011. The Memory Box Initiative, has collected and documented several thousand objects, narratives and stories of victims from different conflict periods across the country. Objects of memory serve as the entry point to people's histories that provide a safe space for victims' narratives to contribute to public acknowledgement of victims' suffering, countering the deep-seated culture of impunity and public amnesia of the true cost of war on ordinary citizens. AHRDO is continuing to build on the Memory Box initiative, by establishing the Afghanistan Centre for Memory and Dialogue in February 2019. The Centre serves as the first Memorial Museum of victims of war where Memory Boxes are put on display for the public.

1. I still wait for her...



Yasir Qubadian, about an incident at Mawuod Tutoring Center, Kabul on August 15, 2018

I am Yaser Qubadian, Kousar's brother. I was born in 2002 and Kousar, two years after me. It was Friday; we were about to take our weekly exams. All of a sudden, everything went dark. I couldn't understand what was happening. When I opened my eyes, I found myself surrounded by the injured and the dead. I didn't think that anything bad had happened to Kousar. I thought she had already gone out. I got out of the class and waited for Kousar near the main road but she didn't come. I went back. I was really scared. The whiteboard in the class was covered in blood. There were body parts everywhere. I did not know that Kousar was sitting in the front row that day. I was searching for her in the third and fourth rows. When I found Kousar, I tried to lift her. I got her onto my shoulders and walked towards the main road. There, I put her in the toolbox of a taxi and took her to the hospital. She was not breathing and her eyes were focused in one direction. The doctor there said that she had passed away. My mother sent Kousar to school with me and I failed to protect her. Even now, when I go to the Academy, I wait for her to come after me. Whenever I get out of my classes, I wait for her near the main road. Upon reaching home, I wait for her to play games with me and when I go to her gravesite, I always tell her, "get up, let's go home."

2. Who will apologise for their deaths?



Mother of Nazar, Feda, Amir and Parwiz Mohammed, on incidents at Kabul, Ghazni and Logar Provinces from 1990-2009

My name is Ziagul. I lost four sons in the war. It was a Friday during Dr. Najibullah's reign that I lost my eldest, Feda Mohammad. He was on his way to a relative's wedding when a few men had taken him to the Kabul River and killed him. I still do not know why. My other son, Amir Mohammad was in the Afghan National Army in Logar. One day, when Amir visited a cucumber farm with some friends, a Taliban rocket hit the farm and killed him. He was tall and handsome. When they delivered his body to us, I remember that his legs were hanging from the coffin. Nazar Mohammad was still a child when he was killed. He used to sell cigarettes in the Puli Mahmmod Khan area during Mujahedeen's rule when a rocket hit him and his tiny kiosk. Parwiz was killed in the Qarabagh District of Ghazni Province. Their deaths shattered me. I lost part of my memory and don't even remember the details of my Parwiz's death. The only thing keeping me alive is my faith and my trust in God's justice. I worked with the Afghanistan Military School for 24 years. When I retired two years ago and claimed my pension, I was refused it. Even after losing my sons, I didn't give up working there but they denied any record of my work. After a few months of persistent struggle, they paid only part of my monthly pension. I served this country my entire life and lost all my sons defending this country but who is going to understand my pain and my loss? Who is responsible for my sons' lives? Who is going to apologise for their deaths? Why is it so difficult to serve and live in this country?

3. Her hands were frigid and numb



Hamid Rafi, on incident at Mawoud Tutoring Center, Dasht-e Barchi on 15 August 2018

I am Hamid Rafi living in Kabul. My youngest sister Rahela, was in the 12th grade when she shared her goals with me: she wanted to pass her general university admission exam, improve her English and secure a scholarship to study abroad. To help achieve her goals, I registered her at a tutoring centre. One day, I was on my way home when I received a call from a relative, asking me if Rahela was home as there had been an explosion at a tutoring centre. I called home to check and heard that Rahela was not back. By the time I reached her class, all the victims had been transferred to hospitals. I checked each hospital one by one but I couldn't find Rahela. At about 10:30 in the night, my father and I visited the last hospital. We moved toward the only body of a girl that was yet to be claimed. My father looked at her face and "This is not my daughter. Where is the other half of her head?" I checked the body too. I looked at her lips. They were familiar. Her clothes were all burned. When I touched her hands, they were frigid and numb. Then a doctor on duty said, "This watch belongs to this body." I recognised the watch because I had bought it for her. I did not have the courage to tell my family what had happened to Rahela. The next day, I took Rahela's body out of the hospital to a mosque. While sitting beside her dead body, I was still hoping that someone would call me from home and tell me that everything was fine. Rahela took all her dreams and hopes to her grave.

4. I have lost 15 family members to war



Sadiq Islamiyaar about incidents in Fishgan Village, Pashtun Zarghoon District, Herat Province from November 24, 1984 - March 9, 2014

I am Sadiq Islamiyaar. I have lost 15 family members from 1984 to 2014. My family has lost too many people to this war. The first incident took place on November 24, 1984, when my paternal family house in Feshgan Village in Herat was bombed by Soviet forces supporting the Afghan Communist regime. The bomb killed a total of 13 people including my paternal grandfather, three uncles and my maternal grandfather. My father and my two other uncles were injured but survived. One of my uncles was married. Both my uncle and his wife were killed. But their 8-years old daughter, Zinnat survived, only to be killed 8 years later during a clash between two rival Mujahidin groups. According to my family, she had been walking from the dining room to the kitchen to bring tea when a stray bullet hit her in the head. She was only 16. Zinnat was a very beautiful young lady and everyone loved her. My paternal grandfather was illiterate, but my maternal grandfather was a Mullah and Haji (a relatively well-off practicing Muslim who can afford to travel to Mecca in Saudi Arabia). After the first incident, my father and his two brothers, all still underage, had no one to support them. They had to work at other people's homes for their daily food and shelter for almost a decade. When they grew up, they built a new house exactly at the same location as the one destroyed by the air raid. But this was not the end of my family's grief and loss. My 26-year old brother, Abdul Sabir, was killed in a suicide attack on March 9, 2014. His death further deteriorated my father's mental and physical health. My brother was married and he is survived by a five-year-old daughter, Hadisa.

5. A bomb fell on their school...



Sumiya Himati, about a school-bombing in Sayed Abda, Bamiyan that killed her brother Edris on 6 March 1999

My brother, Edris, was born in 1986. He was in third grade when he was killed along with one of his classmates, inside their classroom, when the school was bombed by the Taliban. My brothers, Edris and Yasir, went to school that day to receive their exam results. It was around lunch time that Yasir returned to tell us that Edris had been martyred. Yasir and Edris were both in the same class but Edris was close to where the bomb had exploded. Yasir had sustained minor injuries but made the hour's walk home to tell us what happened. According to the people who took Edris to hospital, he was alive when he got to hospital. He had asked the doctors for water. But he was dead by the time my mother arrived at the hospital. Edris' body was brought home that afternoon. We buried our brother at the Sayed Abad cemetery. Edris didn't talk much. He said that he wanted to be a good person; a brave police officer to protect his people. My mother still talks about how Edris and Yasir helped her with household chores. She says Edris was patient and well-behaved. Whenever he had an argument with Yasir, he was very patient and never fought. We took away the things that reminded my mother of Edris to ease her pain. Whenever she thinks of Edris, she says that God is kind and things will be better...



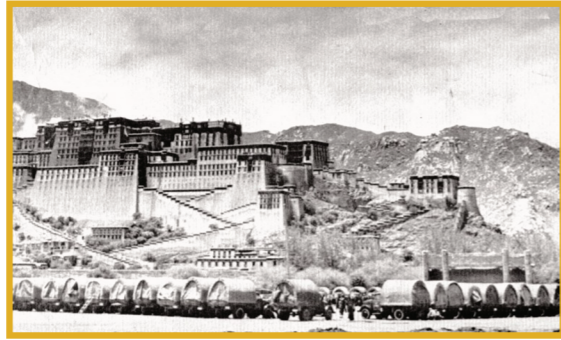
Tibet-in-Exile

Tibet-in-Exile

The 70th anniversary of the 'Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet' – a 17-point declaration - fell on 23 May 2021. The Tibet Museum based in Dharamshala, the repository of alternative histories of Tibet contest the narrative of a peaceful liberation of Tibet, initiation of modernity, and respect for Tibetan's basic rights to live as they choose. By tracing their history through a series of photographs and personal stories, this exhibit presents Tibet's complicated history in their own voice.

Contested Realities

The Tibet Museum has sought to create an inclusive narrative of historical incidents and peoples' histories that 'decolonise' Tibetan history. The museum was established as a repository for the history, cultural heritage and documentation of the lives of Tibetans as they live in exile from the lands of their ancestors. In 2021, The Communist Party of China celebrated the 70th anniversary of the purported 'Liberation of Tibet' from what they term an 'old feudal society'. China's official narrative is of a peaceful liberation and a peaceful Tibet, where economic development, freedom from 'feudal bonds' and the growth of secular cultural institutions ushers in a period of modernity. In the seven decades since 1951, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) claim that the rise in the number of Tibetans protesting and committing self-immolation, the dwindling number of Tibetan religious institutions and cultural centres, the civilian casualties resulting from mining and environmental degradation highlight hidden histories that contest this narrative. It has been estimated that 1.2 million Tibetans have died of starvation, violence, or other indirect causes due to what they term 'the invasion of Tibet'. Furthermore, they contend that religious repression and cultural genocide continues within Tibet; monitoring and surveillance of citizens' activities is at unprecedented levels; language rights are denied; and enforced disappearances and arrests are commonplace.



His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama claimed the 17-point agreement on “Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet” was signed under duress in order to safeguard his people. Despite the terms of the agreement, the Chinese military presence in Tibet grew steadily as seen in this archival photo of military trucks outside the Potala Palace in 1959. Within a few years, an extensive road network linked Lhasa and the rest of Tibet, to China.



On 10 March 1959, after nearly a decade of Chinese military presence, Tibetans in their thousands rose up in protest. While Chinese records claim that 87000 Tibetans lost their lives in quelling the uprising, the Tibetans account for a far higher number. On the night of 17 March 1959, the 23-year-old spiritual and political leader of Tibet, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama disguised himself as a soldier and quietly slipped through the crowds surrounding his summer palace, Norbulingka, in Lhasa, a place that he would never see again. In this archival photo, attendants, family members, cabinet members and the soldiers of Volunteer Freedom Fighters (VFF) accompany His Holiness the Dalai Lama during the treacherous two-week trek across the Himalayan Mountains towards asylum in India. Back in Lhasa, the Chinese imposed a curfew and soon after, the CTA claimed that close to 800 artillery shells were fired into Norbulingka and a day later, dissolved the Tibetan Government while announcing the establishment of a Tibetan Autonomous Region within the People’s Republic of China.



Former monk Tenzin Khedup, 24, and Ngawang Norphel, 22, torch themselves in Dzatoe township, Tridu county, in the Yulshul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture on 20 June 2012. An eyewitness said " Both of them were carrying Tibetan² flags in their hands at the time of the self-immolation," 155 Tibetans have set themselves on fire inside Tibet to protest³ against Chinese ‘occupation’ since 2009. Self-immolation protests peaked in 2012 when more than 80 took place. Tibetans claim that their genuine aspiration for basic freedoms, and the preservation of Tibetan culture and identity has been met with extreme measures of repression within Tibet. In the absence of space for conventional forms of protest, Tibetans resort to drastic measures such as self-immolation to voice their resistance. Although many monks and nuns have set themselves alight, most self-immolation protesters include teachers, students and herdsmen. Their slogans include call for the Dalai Lama’s long life and return to Tibet, for the liberation of the designated Panchen Lama⁴, for human rights, and freedom in Tibet.



Tashi Wangchuk was arrested in January 2016 after giving an interview to The New York Times about his inability to secure the right for children in Tibet to learn the Tibetan language, as guaranteed in China’s constitution. He was a shopkeeper from the Yulshul township of Jyekundo, southeast Tibet. In The New York Times short documentary, Tashi Wangchuk states - “The local government is controlling the actual Tibetan culture, such as the spoken and written language. It looks like development on the surface, but in actual fact, the goal is to eliminate our culture”. He was detained for two years on charges of “inciting separatism” and in May 2018 was sentenced to five years in prison. Tibetan-language schools have been forced to shut down and kindergarten-aged children only receive instruction in Mandarin. However, as a result of appeals from multiple human rights groups, including experts from the United Nations, Tashi Wangchuk was finally released on 28th January 2021.



Kunchok Jinpa, an environmental activist from Chaktse village in Driru country was arrested in April 2013. He was serving a 21-year prison sentence for protesting against a mining project at Naghla Dzambha Mountain in Driru in 2013 at the time. He passed away in February 2021 due to severe injuries sustained in prison. Prior to his arrest, Kunchok Jinpa posted a message on his WeChat account saying, "I am now at the bank of a river. There are many people behind me watching me, and I am sure to be arrested. Even if they arrest me, I am not afraid, even if they kill me, I have no regrets. But from now on, I will not be able to give reports. If there is no word from me, that means I have been arrested."



Tibetans protest environmental degradation, even if it is dangerous to do so. They claim that local grasslands and pastures are being destroyed by Chinese mining operations that have displaced nomadic tribes. The Chinese authorities claim that it is the Tibetan nomads that cause untold damage to the vast grasslands, destroying its natural ecology. Citing soil erosion and gradual desertification due to overgrazing, nearly 2 million nomads from around the Tibetan plateau were forced to abandon their traditional livelihood and resettled into urban settlements. With no way to return to their nomadic roots and lacking education, they are forced to live in extreme poverty. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a nomad stated "Many who had sold their herds when they were first resettled have no way to return to their former lives, and the poorest among them have now resorted to begging in the nearby township just to make ends meet."



Taiwan

Taiwan

Foreign migrant workers give their prime working years to low-wage income and long working hours in what Taiwanese called the '3D' industries, which stands for 'dirty, dangerous and difficult'.

In 1989, Taiwan introduced the first group of migrant workers from Southeast Asia, and it has steadily grown since the passing of the Employment Services Act in 1992. Today the migrant worker population in Taiwan exceeds 710,000, about one-fortieth of Taiwan's total population. Despite being an important driver of the economy, they are either invisible to the general public or simply treated as work-horses who when they are no longer fit to work, run away rather than being repatriated to resort to a life of crime or become victims of violence. Through the oral histories of four migrant workers and their life stories, this exhibit contests that popular narrative.

Mobile

The National Human Rights Museum in Taiwan, shares the real-life stories of four migrant workers to contest the cultural representation of migrants, which occupies a peculiar space. Their existence is considered a market-driven inevitability, always ubiquitous yet invisible in Taiwanese society. They are simultaneously an 'addiction' that Taiwanese society relies upon, yet they are viewed with suspicion as a potential threat or danger to be kept under control. The importance of Taiwan's migrant⁶ laborers cannot be overstated. Yet, Taiwan's treatment of its migrant workers, 90% of who are Southeast Asian, has long been a black mark on its own narrative of freedom and democratic success. Negligence from employers and government agencies appears to run deep. Whether at sea or on land, migrant workers face the same problems: exorbitant commissions taken out of their salaries by brokers; contracts that have been forged or not enforced unless in favour of employers; broken promises about human rights from authorities; and under-reported, yet prevalent physical or sexual abuse. Yet in Taiwanese cultural representations, concerns about migration largely focus on the perception that criminalise migrant workers or deem them problematic. Within this pervasive narrative, it is rare to see positive images of foreign workers. Here, four migrant workers share their own experiences: a day at work filmed on their own mobile phones. Juxtaposing the meagre, sub-human depiction of migrant workers in public consciousness, they share photos of themselves that highlight their resilience in the face of such harsh conditions, their dignity and their humanness.



Indriati

I am 44 years old. I have three children, two of whom are in college and one in high school. They all live in Batang, Indonesia. I decided to come here, because I encountered problems in my marriage. To make my way to Taiwan, I went to Jakarta and there a foreign employment agency helped me. Because the agency paid for the flight and I didn't pay the agent's fee, part of my wage was deducted. It took me 9 months to pay the debt to the agency. I live in my employer's house and I am quite happy. I send home at least NT\$ 10,000 from my NT\$17000 government-approved minimum wage.



Wenit

I am 44 years old. I am from Thailand. My wife and son live in my hometown, Khorat. I was 22 when I first came to Taiwan. I wanted to make money. When I first came, migrant workers' contracts were for two years. After two years, I returned to Thailand to get married and have children. I lived in Khorat for ten years, selling Thai sausages, farming, and growing vegetables. Later on, because my son needs tuition-money for elementary school, I came to Taiwan to work again. No one sponsored me but the employment agency helped secure my visa. They deduct monthly fees from my salary. I send home about NT\$20000 of my NT\$24000 salary. I live with 20 other workers in a dormitory for Thai migrant workers. We are divided into 'morning' and 'evening' shifts, so sharing toilets isn't a problem. The dormitory is good with A/C and decent beds. In my previous job, the treatment I received was very poor, and the colleagues were not friendly. But here, the colleagues in the factory are all Thai. The benefits are very good and we can also earn overtime. Because of COVID-19, I can apply for an extension of the contract for one more year in Taiwan. I am very happy and hope to stay in Taiwan longer.



Firi

I am 27 and I'm from Indonesia. When I was little, my mother worked in the Gulf region for 5 years, so I naturally wanted to work overseas. I studied the conditions and regulations for migrant workers of many countries and decided to work in either Hong Kong or Taiwan, because the salary is higher. The agency helped me with the paperwork. I don't have to send money back home. I would send money back when it's the holidays or when my family needs financial help. The agency deducted various amounts from my salary for 9 months. The first month I only received NT\$ 2,000, and NT\$ 6,000 or 7,000 for the second month. During the third month, I noticed that my employer was going to send me back to Indonesia, so I left and became a so-called "undocumented migrant worker." At that time, the salary for undocumented migrant workers was more than NT\$ 20,000 a month. Several of my employers in Taiwan have prepared separate rooms for me to stay in. Only one of the employers used a screen in the living room to separate a space for me because there was no vacant room at home. I was very happy in Taiwan. After I went back, I felt that I didn't like Indonesia very much. I would compare it with Taiwan. The prices of products are the same as those in Taiwan, but the salary gap was huge.



Imam

I am 27 and from Indonesia. There are 5 people in my family: my parents, my wife and 2 daughters. I came to Taiwan when I graduated from middle school at 18. Many people work overseas as fishermen. My father is a captain on a boat in Cirebon, where we live. I've always wanted to be in the fishing business. There are employment agencies. Many people came to Taiwan to be fishermen and that's how I learned about the job opportunity. The agents helped us apply for visas and we paid them a service fee. The agency deducted my wage to pay the fee. No one sponsored me. I send home living expenses of my family of about NT\$18000; mainly my 2 daughters' diapers and formula milk. I earn NT\$ 25,000 a month, which is enough to buy a small fishing boat. My employer, who is also the captain of the fishing boat, provides a dormitory. I have my own room with a double bed. There are 10 Indonesian fishermen that hang out and dine together. The dorm is clean and comfortable. I am very happy here, because I have many good friends. I hope that I can stay in Taiwan for a long time.



Cambodia

Cambodia

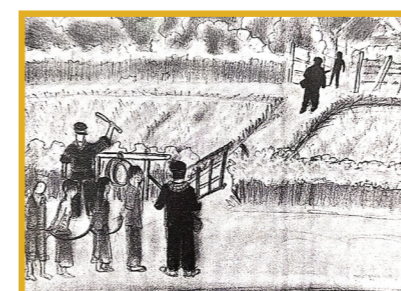
The popular history of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975 to 1979) when nearly 2 million Cambodians - a full quarter of the population – died from execution, starvation, forced labour, malnutrition and torture is one that permeates the public consciousness. It is a cacophony of voices and stories that flash across memory, when one thinks of popular Cambodian history, from the stacked skulls extracted from the killing fields to the images of mangled iron beds in the S21 prison. However, there are some stories yet to be told, especially in fleshing out the publicly available information with personal details. Three exhibits from Cambodia will focus on survivors' narratives from the period of history dominated by the Khmer Rouge, especially the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, and the continuing need for memorialising the victims of violence through inter-generational dialogue.

In April 1975, the war in Vietnam ended. Yet, in Cambodia the Khmer Rouge (KR)⁶ revolutionaries took over, ruling until January 1979. During that time, more than 1.7 million people died from starvation, overwork, lack of health care, and executions. In December 1978, the Vietnamese army swept into Cambodia with a core group of former KR Cambodians who had fled to Vietnam during the Vietnamese War. Civil war then broke out in Cambodia and along the Thai-Cambodian border between four factions: the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) headed by Prime Minister Hun Sen (who remains prime minister today), versus the KR and the non-communist resistance (NCR) led by Cambodia's former king Sihanouk, and Republicans led by Son Sann. Prolonging the conflict, each side was supported by external actors, who played along Cold War divides. The war stretched on for fourteen years until the autumn of 1991. The Paris Peace Agreements (PPA) offered a comprehensive political settlement aimed at ending the "tragic conflict and continuing bloodshed in Cambodia" and ended the Vietnam-Cambodia conflict and brought foreign troops out of Cambodia. Once signed, the PPA created the first large multinational UN peacekeeping mission of the post-Cold War era. Within the commonly held narratives of the brutality and violence of the Cambodian civil war, The Peace Institute of Cambodia, Youth for Peace Cambodia and Kdei-Karuna share little-known stories and perspectives of survivors highlighting the need to 'never forget'.

Sketched Pain

The Peace Institute Cambodia

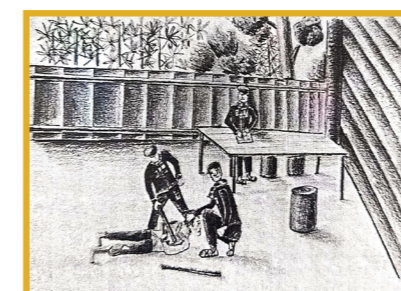
Few official documentations exist, either by former cadres of the Khmer Rouge or of victim-survivors from the areas surrounding former security centres such as Kraing Ta Chan⁷. After the war, villagers and perpetrators of violence, lived for decades holding onto their suffering, shame and painful memories. The telling of these memories can at times re-traumatise but it can also heal over time. The Peace Institute Cambodia acknowledges that difficult histories of violence are traumatic and transgenerational. But they also believe that these long-forgotten stories must be shared with new generations if they are to understand history, remember the human cost of war and possibly prevent recurrence of violent conflict in the future. The following exhibit from the project "Stories from the Ground: Memory Sketch of Kraing Ta Chan Security Centre" showcases victim-survivor descriptions of life during the Khmer Rouge as drawn by students in an effort to document and process the transgenerational trauma of the people surrounding the centre.



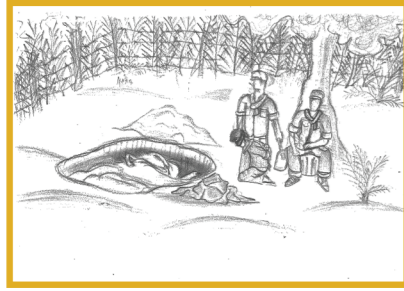
Some of the prisoners who were brought to the centre were brought for dishonesty to the 'Angkar'⁸ or guards; Some were brought because they broke things, as simple as utensils; Some were accused of betraying the Angkar by stealing corn, potatoes, frogs and other food; Some were accused of speaking badly of the Angkar. Regardless of the reason for imprisonment, the result was always the same: interrogation and death for most people.



Some prisoners were put to work in the rice fields. They were out during the day and returned to the centre at night. There were other tasks as well such as herding, collection of firewood, palm-water collection, composting, harvesting, tilling the soil. They were also forced to collect cadavers, dig graves, and bury the dead. Their food rations remained the same as for those serious offenders who were shackled in their huts all day and night: one ladle of rice porridge. Sometimes the cook (who was also a prisoner) would leave food out for prisoners to find, but this did not happen too.



There was almost always an interrogation at the centre. The routine was always the same: the guards ask questions, regardless of the answer, the prisoners are tortured. There were many methods of torture used: they were cut with knives in their abdomen, arms, quadriceps; their noses, ears, nails and teeth were removed; they were severely beaten; hung upside down from a tree with their head submerged in water; insects were put on them; choked or strangled with plastic bags over their heads; sprinkled with acid; and if it were a woman, raped violently. The cries of the prisoners would be muffled by loud-speakers tied to a tree. Once the prisoner died, they would move to the next of kin and the process would repeat.



The process of execution was crude. They were brought to the edge of an open grave blind-folded, and asked to kneel. Their throat was slit; or their abdomen was sliced through with a sword; or they were beaten to death with a steel pole. Sometimes they were shot. They were especially cruel with children: They would toss the children up in the air to fall onto bayonets; they would take babies by their legs and bash them against the 'killing tree'; Sometimes they were buried alive with their parents. The prisoners would be called out by their names; the last thing they heard was always " Before you go back home you must pay respects to the Angkar and receive new instructions"



People who lived in the surrounding villages claim that they never knew that there were killing pits in the area. According to the unearthed skeletal remains and documentation left behind after the war ended, at least 10000 people were killed there. There could be more as the site has not been fully excavated.

Do or Die

Kdei-Karuna Organisation, Cambodia

Kdei-Karuna aims to encourage empathy and understanding from hatred and anger through a deep, reflective dialogue process, helping people to voice their painful memories. This project focuses on little heard narratives of suppression of ethnic minorities and sexual and gender based violence. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, Khmer, ethnic minorities, and indigenous peoples were prohibited from practicing their religion. Khmer Rouge primarily targeted Cham, Vietnamese and Khmer Kampuchea Krom. These ethnic minorities were expelled, systematically killed or made to work in inhuman conditions. The Khmer Rouge also deprived people of individual rights, including the right to choose a marriage partner. Selected by the Angkar, most couples were arbitrarily married without choice or consent. Those who voiced their disagreement were detained, severely tortured, or sent to work far from their cooperatives. Aside from forced marriage, Khmer Rouge cadres committed other forms of sexual violence throughout the period. The four oral histories bear witness to these crimes.



Do Yang Aun, 50, Ethnic minority Vietnamese from Kampong Chhnang province

" While I was carrying soil along the edge of the dam, I fell and blacked out. When I regained consciousness, I heard someone cursing at me. He said, "Ah Yuon, you used to eat well, sleep well, right? Do you not want to do this type of work? Do you want to die, Youn? Keeping you is useless, and getting rid of you would not be a loss." As soon as he finished speaking, he began hitting my body with a stick. My body became swollen. I wept because of the pain, but I tried my best to conceal my tears. Crying would only give them a reason to kill me. They had already killed my brother."



Sal Ismael, 66, ethnic-minority Cham from Kandal province

"We Cham people were not treated differently than others during the eviction from our villages. We only became targeted when we arrived at our respective cooperatives. There, we were not allowed to practice our religion. The Khmer Rouge did not give us a reason, but we were too afraid to ask for one. We were just told to stop, so we stopped. Our traditions dictate that we must have long hair, but we were forced to cut it short. After arriving in the village, we were assigned to live in different houses, but our community still worked together. The Khmer Rouge treated us poorly by putting pork in the rice porridge. If we did not eat it, we would have nothing else to eat. Some Cham people had to force themselves to eat, but I resisted because of my Muslim beliefs. We Cham people were forced to work like the other Khmer people. My parents died under the Khmer Rouge, and many of my relatives died from starvation or were killed. We were accused of having military ranks in the former government, but we were just ordinary people. It was very obvious that the Khmer Rouge just wanted to kill us."



Mom Von, 65, Siem Reap province

"I was forced to marry a widower with eight children. I did not agree to the marriage, but they didn't listen to my refusal. On that day, the Khmer Rouge leaders ordered 60 couples to get married. We were each given a pair of shoes. For decorations, there were only two vases of flowers on the table. We were forced to voice commitments to live with each other, and to contribute to raising our future children. When we left the mass ceremony, my new husband and I chose not to have intercourse, but then four Khmer Rouge cadres came into our cottage. They forced us to have sex in front of them. With shame, we followed their order for fear of being killed just like the others who did not obey."



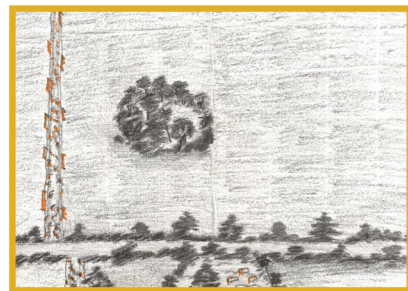
Yam Las, 76, Preah Sihanouk province

"At about 10 p.m., a Khmer Rouge cadre asked me to meet him. I asked him why he wanted to meet me at such a late hour. He accused me of wanting to escape to Vietnam, and because of that, I was afraid so I followed him. About 30 metres from my home, he pushed me against a coconut tree, and then squeezed my neck until I could barely breathe. When he released his hands, he undressed my sarong and began to violently rape me. I fainted, so I did not know what happened next. At dawn, I woke up and crawled back home."

The Monk-Dug Canal

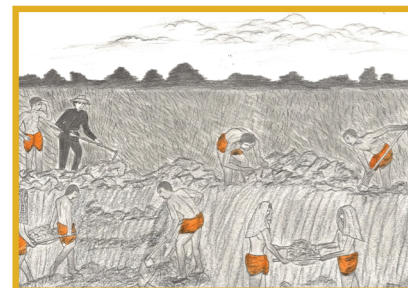
Youth for Peace, Cambodia

Youth for Peace Cambodia's co-documentation projects attempt to contribute to memory-building, truth-seeking, healing and reconciliation in Samrong Knong, Battambang in Cambodia. To preserve history and narratives of the community, Youth for Peace brings together youth and those whose experiences need to be documented – in this case Buddhist monks who were forced to relinquish their robes - they create space for co-documentation, understanding and healing without which these stories will disappear from public memory. The co-documentation process transforms both individuals, and transfers memory between generations. This is the story of Tun Tem, a victim-survivor and former monk as told to Rachana Chetha and Keo Rancha, a student.



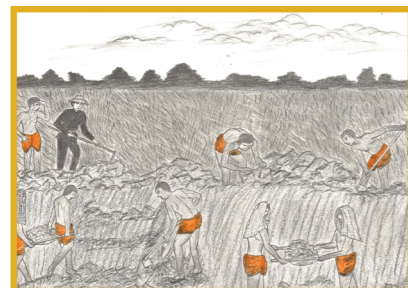
The Canal

During the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), people in Cambodia were subjected to different forms of torture and maltreatment such as starvation, hard labour, and physical and psychological abuse. During this time, the Khmer Rouge tried to eliminate Buddhism and the forced disrobement of monks whom the Khmer Rouge called 'parasites of society'. As such, around 300 monks in various pagodas in Battambang province were gathered to stay in Samrong Knong pagoda in Ek Phnom district. From January to April 1976 after the rice harvesting season, all the monks were forced to construct a canal for agricultural purposes. The canal is approximately 1,500 meters in length, 4 meters in width, and 2 meters in depth. This canal is now known as "monk-dug canal".



Forced labour

To force monks to disrobe, the Khmer Rouge forced them to work, dig, and complete the canal construction. The monks experienced nearly 12 hours of forced labour from early morning until sundown with little or no rest. In effect, the regime compelled the monks to violate Buddhist norms and virtues which altered Cambodian society. Seeing the suffering of the monks, Mr. Kak Sakhon, a civilian known to some monks, sometimes snuck in to help the monks. This was despite the ban on entering the area which was heavily guarded by the Khmer Rouge.



Food for slaves

During the lunch breaks, the Buddhist monks were allowed to prepare their own food consisting of dried fish and some vegetables. The monks were left to eat at the hill next to the canal like slaves since none of the Buddhist followers were allowed to serve food to them. This hill is now a location for the "Toul Ampel Pagoda".



Disrobing for survival

Unable to endure the forced labour and lack of food, many monks decided to disrobe on the hill near the canal construction site. There was the case of Uncle Thun Sovath, who decided to disrobe in the early morning of April 1976 under a big tree near the canal after persistent intimidation from the Khmer Rouge. In each disrobement, the monks had to do it independently with few other witnesses, which is against the rules for Buddhist monks.



Into the Wilderness

While many monks chose to disrobe to continue their lives as ordinary citizens, eleven (11) monks refused to disrobe. Consequently, they were forced to leave the canal construction site at three o'clock in the morning under the order from the Khmer Rouge to go to the jungle. Without clear direction, the eleven monks arrived in another village. They stayed there for a month to do agriculture until one day, the Khmer Rouge came and ordered them to disrobe by 17 April 1976.



The Last Walk

After the second order by the Khmer Rouge, the eleven monks eventually agreed to disrobe at Chumpu Prek pagoda. On 11 April 1976, which was a Memorial Day to fallen Khmer Rouge soldiers, the monks who were walking on their way to Chumpu Prek pagoda, were met by a group of Khmer Rouge soldiers that had come to salute them. The eleven monks are remembered as the "17th April Monks", the last of the monks of the Khmer Rouge regime.



Bangladesh

Bangladesh

The Liberation War of 1971, which created the state of Bangladesh carries with it stories of genocide, violence and loss. Some of these stories captures ethnic discrimination as sexual and gender based violence, during the Genocide of 1971. Old norms of gendered violence, propagated through public perceptions deny the victims of sexual violence their dignity. This exhibition showcases the stories of survivors of sexual and gender based violence that speak their truths to demystify the humiliation and public shame placed on the victim.

The Rape of Bangladesh

During the Liberation war of 1971, the Pakistani Army, together with their local collaborators used sexual violence and rape as a weapon of war. The objective was cultural genocide, a change in ethno-linguistic identity through Pakistani children born to Bengali women. Many of the victims of such traumatic sexual violence were ostracised by their families and had no place to go; many were pregnant and faced humiliation. In the aftermath of Bangladesh's victory in 1971, the Government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman recognised these women as 'war heroines' and vowed to "give due honour and dignity to the women oppressed by the Pakistani army". The government gave them clinical support and chose to rehabilitate them through war-baby adaptation programmes, marriage, vocational training and livelihood support. These 'Beeranganas' were forgotten due to erasure and censorship during the long military-rule that followed the killing of Sheikh Mujib in 1975. The distortion of history and erasure of the Beeranganas was remedied after years of lobbying from activist groups and the victory of pro-liberation forces in the national election of 2008. The new government initiated the trial of perpetrators of genocide and declared the Beeranganas as 'Freedom Fighters'. This photo-exhibit showcases archival material sourced by the Liberation War Museum to highlight the hidden history and complicated legacy of sexual violence and rape as a weapon of war in the Liberation War of 1971.



This photograph expresses the silent suffering⁹ of an anonymous college girl from a district town; her long hair covers her face to protect her identity but her clenched fists also show her resilience. It is representative of the sorrow of many women who were tortured by the Pakistani Army in their camps. These women, seen as ‘fallen women’ by society and their families, were condemned to live in the shadow of shame, until the formal recognition as ‘Beeranganas’.



In the Pakistani Army camp¹⁰ at Shalutikar Airport, Sylhet, Bengali women were kept in confinement and tortured. The erotic drawings on the walls bear testimony to the suffering of those unfortunate women. It also bears witness to the gendered nature of rape as a weapon of war against women.



Bangladesh Nari Punorbashon Songstha (Bangladesh Women’s Rehabilitation Organization) was established by the government in collaboration with the civil society in February 1972 to rehabilitate the victims of rape with technical and humanitarian support. The government provided them with vocational training and launched a campaign to get them married. Previously, many of these women were often ostracised by society and their families. Rape effectively severed these women from kinship, family and social structures. This programme was aimed at rehabilitating their position in society and image through multiple socio-economic programmes and arranged marriages. Here, women at the centre make crafts with jute.



The martyr and victim families¹¹ in a procession on the streets demanding the trial of war criminals. They supported the Beeranganas in accusing the local collaborators of the Pakistani army of sexual violence



Raped and impregnated by a Pakistani soldier, the teenage girl in this photograph will leave her new-born baby for adoption at Mother Teresa’s Home. The government relaxed the law to allow adoption. The first fifteen war-babies from Bangladesh left for their new home with families from abroad in Canada on July 19, 1972. Throughout 1972, the children were adopted and sent to Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Canada and other countries. The government also offered abortions to those victims willing to do so. There has been subsequent debate about the agency of the violated women in deciding for themselves, especially as they were ostracised from their families and perceived by their communities as a visible reminder of rape



Ferdousi Priyabhashini (1948–2018) was the first person to publicly announce herself as Beerangona, breaking the silence. Her story is a powerful study in the complexity of survival in wartime and thereafter. Even though she was raped and tortured for 9 months, she had a 28-year period of silence, channelling her pain and personal struggle into sculpture instead. She was a renowned sculptor and artist. She symbolized the resilience and strength of the Beerangona and was honoured by later generations. In recognition of her outstanding contribution to the society, the Bangladesh Government awarded her the Independence Award in 2010.



Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka

Tales of heroism, re-building and socio-economic development after devastation are familiar narratives of war and victory, often told from the vantage point of victors. In these tales the human cost of conflict is rarely highlighted. Sri Lanka's ethno-political and religious history is complicated. It is further complicated by a protracted war of nearly three decades. This series of exhibits draws a thread between the work of three organisations, highlighting the need to collect and archive outsider narratives in order to contest single narratives that impact rights, peace and justice of those that remain.

Freeing one's own voice from that of another in the very act of telling one's own lived experience, is a democratisation of truth. It is a claim on one's own life, agency and place in Sri Lanka's historical narrative. In the aftermath of Sri Lanka's protracted 26-year conflict, memory plays a crucial role. As humanity has seen countless times, the past is often mobilised in the service of political agendas and ideologies. The victors often glorify their wars to legitimise and cement their role as master and arbiter of historical narrative. Those narratives that exist outside of this space, are often erased or fade into obscurity. When people find their voice to tell their own histories, the 'official' narratives become more than a linear series of events, but an interpretation of how one felt as a witness to those events. The Herstories Project, The International Centre for Ethnic Studies and the Institute for Social Development share projects that focus on the lived experience of ordinary individuals to bring hidden narratives to life.

Herstories

The Herstories Project, Sri Lanka

The Herstories Project was one of the first archival initiatives of its kind following the end of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009. Because of the manner in which the war ended – a definitive military solution rather than a peace process, to a conflict rooted deeply in social, political and religious tensions – a masculine lens of heroism dominates the 'official' narrative of history. Conducted together with Viluthu Centre for Human Resources Development, before an official transitional justice mechanism was adopted in SL in 2015, it was a pioneering project in public history archiving with 285 women's stories collected between 2012-2013. It is a deliberate effort to feminise the historical narratives of war and to give voice to marginalised histories of women's experiences in conflict. The very word history highlights a male-centric narrative prioritising 'his'-story. This project is an attempt to complete the narrative of history with 'her'-story. As an archive, the stories go beyond the women themselves as they speak of their children and family members lost to war; their hopes for their remaining children; the stories of their villages and their neighbours. It transcends boundaries and divisions to highlight a fundamental sense of humanity. They are stories of displacement, disappearance, death, loss but they are also stories of survival, hope, resilience and courage.



There is no end to our sadness

As of 2012 it is 4 years since my son disappeared. The war was between the LTTE and the Government; but we couldn't protect our sons who were not part of it. When my son went missing it was as if I was living half a life. On this estate about 15 young men disappeared. All the parents got together to look for our sons. We went to the Red Cross, to Human Rights Commission and to the Police. I went to Colombo several times. I was taken to the prison to see whether he was there, but he wasn't. The disappearances stopped the day the war ended. We have lived here for 25 years. My son worked on the rubber plantations. He would bring us money at the end of the week and spend on my medicines. We are resigned to a future without our son and living from hand to mouth, making most of the little we have. Our daughter went to the Middle East and we haven't heard from her for a long time. Her husband also disappeared. So we look after their two children. We make about 500 Rupees a day making spoons. I would like to tell those parents who did not lose their children, that they must have done something good. We must have done something bad for this to happen to us. We are happy that the war ended; but there is no ending to our sadness because our son disappeared. I would like to tell our leaders that if they had done what was right, this would never have happened.



What's the point of hatred?

My son was 4 days shy of 20 when he died. When my son wanted to join the army I said, no. But he was adamant, I remember how he'd hit the wall with his fists, he wanted to join so badly. He said he didn't have a proper job and needed one now that his father was dead. My husband didn't have a permanent job, being a gem miner. He also hadn't saved any money. We had some assets including a vehicle, but my husband's parents, in their anger that I wasn't giving them my children, took it all. I lost my mind because of my son's death. I would spend almost all my time sitting on his grave. I have come here (Ranavirugama) because this house is my son's house. I got this house because of my son, my only son. I brought him up with so much love. I keep his picture garlanded like this because of the extent of my love for him. I mourn for him much more than I mourned for my husband. It's an unbearable pain I feel when I think of him. It was when I came to this village that I was able to come to terms with my loss. It was because I saw other people who had similar experiences and had all gone through so much. My three daughters are very strong women. My eldest daughter married from the army, but a mortar struck her husband and he was wounded. The other is married from Ratnapura. My youngest daughter is going through so much because she married a man who is not very good. That's why I am taking care of her kids. The daughter works in a garment factory. I use my son's salary to take care of these children. Even now, there is some anger I feel against Tamil people. But there is a story that goes like this: If we cut ourselves, it's the same blood that we see. So then, what's the point of hatred?



We lived under a mango tree

My parents are originally from Ingiriya. It was because of the ethnic problems in the 1970s that we went to Kilinochchi. I was 7 years old. My father went back to Horana, my mother lives in Kil ve in Vavuniya. We lived close to an LTTE camp. When the shelling started, the shells hit our homes, so we fled with our belongings in 2008. Then we moved a further three miles away, and this time couldn't carry our belongings. Then we had to move from there as well because the children couldn't bear the sound of shelling. We had no place to live so we lived under the mango trees. Here, my mother-in-law had a heart attack when a shell struck close by and died. Then the LTTE started taking away our children. We have five children. My eldest daughter was taken but she escaped and came back. I took off my thaali and made her wear it. I put the red pottu of a married woman on her forehead – because married women were less likely to be taken away by the LTTE. Then to make things more convincing I folded a sari and wrapped it around her stomach so that she would look pregnant. It was around this time that I was struck on my foot and in my lower stomach and my brother on his arm. It was in February 2009. We were caught in the crossfire. We don't know if it was the Army or the LTTE. When we made it to the camp, my husband and I got separated. An ICRC ship took my daughter and son. I was first at the Trincomalee hospital and then they moved me to Dambulla. Afterwards, in Menik farm I was reunited with my husband. The Army took my older daughter on suspicion of being an LTTE member. She was sent for rehabilitation and released a year later. My two daughters are now in Kilinochchi. They are married. My other three children are with me and my husband works in a shop. We got this land from Sri TELO and the house from IOM. We have a problem with flooding. We are being offered land where we used to be, but I need to be here to treat my foot. There are better services in Vavuniya. Here, I get transport to hospital for my treatment from the Church. Now we live with a few Muslim and Sinhala families. We live well together.





I lost my mind

It was with such difficulty that I brought up my four children. My husband worked hard as a day labourer. My son decided to join the army because he saw how hard his father worked. We didn't want him to join. But he insisted. When my son lost his legs I lost my mind. I took medicine for about three months and felt slightly better. People don't understand why I feel so terribly sad all the time. But even now when I think of my son, my head hurts. Things are better now that the war has stopped. Even now when I meet a Tamil person there's a sense of hatred that I feel. But I know there is no point in hating. They are also mothers who have lost their children; at least my son is alive and here in front of me. I don't feel angry with all Tamils; not all of them were responsible. We are no longer afraid. I have convinced myself that what happened was for the country and for the nation. It's bearable when I look at it that way. We've experienced fear for different reasons. There was the JVP earlier. Then the Tigers would attack villagers and buses. They would be hiding in the jungle. My son is 20. He is building his house. I would like to see it complete. That would make me happy. I have one single aim now, which is that my son builds a good life for himself.



Picturing Coexistence

International Center for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies uses comics as a means of creating a space for individuals to reflect on, articulate and narrate their (sometimes inexpressible) experiences, prejudices or understanding of coexistence as it relates to the 'other'. They contest the narrative that in post-war Sri Lanka, communities are divided irrevocably. They speak of coexistence at community level as the norm and not the exception, until external actors deliberately create disharmony for their own gain. These first-hand experiences, documented in the form of comics, are powerful visual tools for change, where individuals become both storytellers and agents of change who help others recall and critically evaluate their own feelings of suspicion, insecurity and desire for co-existence. The comics in the project are introspective, self-critical and reflect multiple experiences of both discrimination and coexistence. One of the common themes that cuts across them is that discrimination is based on ignorant assumptions about others' beliefs and values. Conversely, coexistence as the norm rather than the exception at community level until and unless they are disturbed by external actors is another theme that cuts across them. The comics were developed in partnership with World Comics India.



Coexistence through the storm

Thangamani is a little girl whose family lives in a Sinhalese village. One day there is a storm and their home is completely destroyed. Thangamani's father also injured his leg when a branch of a tree fell on him. The Sinhalese community gets together, and in two months, builds a home for Thangamani's family. Thangamani is so happy that they have a shelter from rain and she can go to school. The Sinhalese community is happy that they could come together to build a home for this Tamil family. At the house-warming function Thangamani's father says, "We should unite regardless of ethnic and religious divisions and not allow any 'storms' to affect our village."

- Upul



Respect Diversity

During assembly, the Principal of a school asks all the children to place their palms together for worship. A Muslim boy tells this to his mother. His mother explains to the Principal that Muslims cannot place their palms together and pray. The Principal says, "It's good that you informed me." She accepts this difference and announces the next day that while Buddhist students can place their palms together to worship, students of other religions can engage in their own religious activities.

- M.M.N. Mansoon



Who doesn't know the way?

Two friends are travelling on a bus. They do not know where their stop is, but they are not afraid because they see other members of their ethnic community on the bus. One friend asks a passenger from her community for directions. The passenger laughs at her and asks her why she got into the bus without knowing the way. The two friends feel betrayed by their own community and wonder what to do. One man calls them and tells them that he will show them the way. The friends agree that even though the man who helped them belongs to another ethnic group, he is a good person.

- Fawza



Be united and don't argue unnecessarily

A mosque announces that there will be a Haj festival event the next day and the Buddhist temple too announces there will be a ceremony to invoke blessings the next day. The Buddhists ask the Muslims to reduce the volume and the Muslims refuse. This leads to conflict between the two groups. Religious leaders such as the Buddhist monks and Moulavis realise the danger and call the two groups together and ask them to stop the violence and negotiate an agreement. The monk reminds the Buddhists that true followers of Buddhism do not espouse violence. Then, he agrees to postpone the Buddhist event to the following day and the Muslims also agree to have their event as planned.

- Keerivalawe Sangarathne Thero



Preaching on Facebook

Anwar creates a Facebook page and tells his friend that he is going to start a Facebook group which speaks ill of Buddhists. His friend discourages him saying that one Muslim's rash deed blackens the whole Muslim community. "But, there are a lot of Buddhist groups which spread hate speech about Muslims" Anwar retorts. "Not all Buddhists are like that. The ones who create such groups are as misinformed as you" his friend replies and advises Anwar to enlighten misinformed groups on Facebook instead.

- S.M. Fawsan

Migration and Return

Institute of Social Development, Sri Lanka

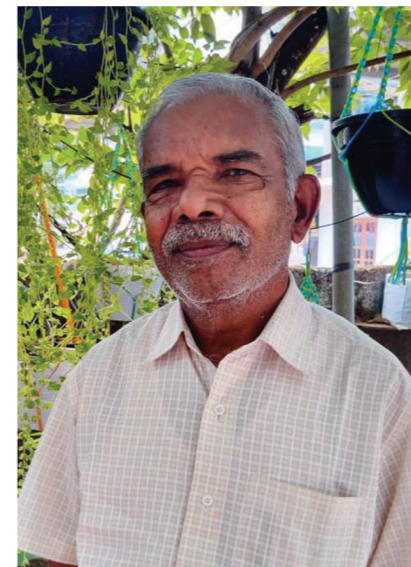
This oral history project by the Institute for Social Development captures stories of re-migration and internal displacement of estate-sector Tamil communities. In order to understand how centuries after forced migration as indentured labour from India, statelessness, systematic discrimination and poverty shape their politics, identity and place in Sri Lankan society. These stories of migration¹² are rarely heard even within the narrative of the plantation sector; they are even less common in the narrative of Sri Lanka's conflict narrative. This exhibit traces the history of migration through three stories of (re)migration.



P.D. Millie's account of the early days of coffee planting in Ceylon (circa 1878) cites the arduousness¹³ of this journey thus: "This jungle fever more or less attacks coolies and masters all along immigration road. Generally on a soft, short sward of grass, in the opening of the jungle, may be seen the groans of the coolies who dies on the road. Sometimes a rude sort of cross maybe erected at the heads of them – these are Christian probably, almost invariably Roman Catholics. These graves were dug hurriedly, without any proper tools, in a hard scorched-up ground, were very shallow and insufficient depth. The consequences were that Jackals dug into them and fed on the corpses. Sometime even drawing them out of the graves, so that there might be seen scattered about bleached skulls and bones. It was not unusual to see dying coolies and dead bodies, lying along roadside. During onward journey the sick were frequently left behind in order that the whole gang might hurry on to the estate as speedily as possible".



My name is Chandrasegaram. I was born on 3 June 1943 at Badulla Rockhill estate. My parents were estate workers there. I became a trade unionist, eventually becoming Assistant District Representative for Haputale. In 1968, without informing me, my parents had applied for Indian citizenship under the Sirima-Shastri Pact¹⁴. I refused to leave with them. I told them "this is my country". In 1977 I visited my parents. They lived in a small hut in the village of Karambakudi without any facilities. It was bearable for me to see them like that. I returned to Sri Lanka, vowing never to live in India. While working at the Trade Union, I started a small printing press in the Haputale town. In the ethnic riot of 1983, my printing press was burned down. I was left with nothing. This incident changed my mind. I felt, "I could no longer live in this country that I loved so much and was determined to live until my last days". In 1985 I left the country with nothing more than one shirt and a pair of trousers. I landed in Chennai and experienced first-hand, the suffering of migrants that I had seen before when I visited my parents. Later, I moved to Kothagiri and together with Mr. Sivalingam we formed an organisation called Malayah Makkal Maruvalu Manram (Hill-country Peoples Renaissance Movement) to work for the betterment Sri Lankan re-migrants who, after generations as indentured labourers in Sri Lanka, suffer upon their return to India. Hopefully, a new generation can enjoy the rights we were denied because of it.



My name is M.C . Kandiah. My father was born in 1913 at the Namukula estate in Badulla district. My grandfather was brought to work in Ceylon in the late 1800s. My family moved from one estate to another and I was born in Sambuwatta estate. I am fifth among nine children. I studied in the estate school up to the 4th grade as the school there was only up to Grade 5. Due to the poverty, I was unable to continue studying beyond that. At age 13 I started working as a shop assistant in Kandy to help my family. In the 60's I started to write poems and short stories to the papers. During this period my parents applied for Indian Citizenship under Sirima-Shastri Pact. I opposed it and took a decision not to leave my motherland. In 1969 I became a member of the Communist Party of Ceylon (Peking wing) and from 1970 onwards I became a full-timer of the party. A few years after the 1971 insurrection when our party-leaders were jailed, the party split into two factions. I disagreed with both so I, together with some other Tamil-speaking members, formed Malayaha Makkal Iyakkam (Hill-country People's Movement) in 1976. Following the 1977 ethnic riot MMI organised a meeting to discuss the future of the plantation community when it was decided that they would encourage the community to migrate to India. I opposed that move and disassociated from the Movement but continued my work thinking of myself as a son of this soil. During the 1983 ethnic riot, the owner of my rental home saved my family from the mobs but told me that he couldn't guarantee our safety in the future. This touched a nerve and in 1985 my family and I migrated to India with a heavy heart. I am still nostalgic for Sri Lanka.



My name is Chandrasegaram. I was born on 3 June 1943 at Badulla Rockhill estate. My parents were estate workers there. My name is Nageswari. I was born in Rattota, Matale. In 1983 during the ethnic riots, the mobs came to the estate. At that time, my mother, my siblings and I, hid in the jungles adjoining the estate. After five days of chaos, my father took us to Killinochchi. When we reached Killinochchi, we didn't know anyone. We slept on the road for two days. We were exhausted and scared. Later my father spoke to a man there, and told him that we were looking for a place to live and work. Through that, we found this bit of land. It was a thick jungle then. My parents cleared the land and put up a little hut. There were six in my family, one elder brother and four sisters. It is still where we all currently live. The Tamils who were native to Killinochchi, used to call us Vadakaththiyan (Northerners) to insult us. They used to taunt us and tell us that we didn't have any rights here. We felt like we didn't belong anywhere. Still, in 1993, I joined the Movement (LTTE). My brother also joined. Later my four sisters also joined the Movement. All my sisters died in action. Only my brother and I survived. While in the Movement I got married and left. During the war we suffered unbearable hardship. Currently I am divorced and I live here with my two children. I became a trade unionist, eventually becoming Assistant District Representative for Haputale. In 1968, without informing me, my parents had applied for Indian citizenship under the Sirima-Shastri Pact. I refused to leave with them. I told them "this is my country". In 1977 I visited my parents. They lived in a small hut in the village of Karambakudi without any facilities. It was bearable for me to see them like that. I returned to Sri Lanka, vowing never to live in India. While working at the Trade Union, I started a small printing press in the Haputale town. In the ethnic riot of 1983, my printing press was burned down. I was left with nothing. This incident changed my mind. I felt, "I could no longer live in this country that I loved so much and was determined to live until my last days". In 1985 I left the country with nothing more than one shirt and a pair of trousers.



Nepal

Nepal

The human toll of the 'People's War' (1996-2006) in Nepal was profound; over 17,000 people were killed, 1,500 disappeared and an estimated 20,000 tortured. Almost eight years passed before any transitional justice mechanism was formalised when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Commission of Inquiry into Enforced Disappearances were legally mandated by Parliament. There were 60,000+ cases lodged, but both the commissions failed to address the needs of the victims' families. The two exhibits from Nepal showcase the continuing grief and struggle for the truth of those left behind. They challenge the official narrative that peace has been 'achieved', as to those who accompany the families of the disappeared, believe that "delayed justice is no justice at all".

Despite the 2006 peace agreement¹⁵ and constant pledges by both sides to provide information regarding the fates of their loved ones, families of the disappeared continue to wait. While victims' families want to see perpetrators brought to justice, what they also need is recognition of their loss, and meaningful reforms that advance social justice. A victim-centric process requires political will. In Nepal, while transitional justice processes have enjoyed nominal support, the Nepali government never prioritised transitional justice in its national agenda, and the Commissions have been prevented from fulfilling their mandate. A more inclusive transitional justice process will move the debate beyond rigid notions of accountability to include the full range of injustices and localised concerns of conflict-victims. Both, the Network of Families of the Disappeared and Voices of Women Nepal work on transitional justice issues and believe in advocating for a victim-centred approach. Their work contests historical memories of the conflict through story-telling.

Quilted Memories

Network of Families of the Disappeared, Nepal

In partnership with the Advocacy Project, Network of Families of the Disappeared worked with 40 women who have lost a family member to enforced disappearance to share their story through an advocacy quilt. The women were part of a cooperative that supported each other. This project responds to three key needs of families of the missing: It provides a way for the women to speak out against the crime of enforced disappearance, to honour the memory of their missing husbands, and to gain a marketable skill that can help them support their families.



My mother was tortured by security forces when she inquired about my father's whereabouts

Sarita Thapa was eleven when her father Shayam was denounced by a neighbour as a Maoist and detained. Sarita, her mother and younger brother were then ostracized and driven from the village. Sarita gave up school to concentrate on the search for her father. When her mother went looking for information about her father, she disappeared as well. For five days, Sarita and her family didn't know if her mother was ever coming back. When her mother was finally allowed to come home, they learned that she had been tortured. She still suffers from injuries inflicted during her imprisonment but her resilience shines through. Sarita endured further tragedy after her husband died from a snake-bite. But these misfortunes only stiffened Sarita's resolve. She returned to school and completed grade 12 with girls half her age.



I was too little to remember my father's facial expression, but I remember the midnight when they took him away

Sharmila's memorial square stands out for its raw and angry denunciation of the army. It describes the arrest of her father Kallu, who was in no way political. "A large group of soldiers came to our home and demanded that we open the door. My father was not even dressed. At least they allowed him to put on some clothes." The family went to the local army base but could get no news. Sharmila was the youngest of six children. She has had to work the land to make ends meet and pay for university. She finds it difficult to forget as she says "My family was dependent on my father. I remember him a lot!"



My father was on his knees the last time I saw him

Kushma made two squares describing the way her father Ton Bahadur was taken at night by soldiers. Kushma was seven at the time and does not remember the incident, but her mother has described it many times: "The army came to my home, took my father away and beat him." He was not a Maoist, but active in social work in the community. He won election and got into an argument with an unsuccessful candidate who denounced him to the army. He had many friends in the village, but the army did not investigate". Kushma left school after grade 10 because money was short. She is still not married at the age of 24 because her mother cannot afford to pay a second dowry after Kushma's older sister was married a year ago. Kushma testified before the Disappearances Commission in 2016. But her mother will not register her husband as dead until she learns what happened.



My husband was a carpenter not a terrorist

Manju was still trying to come to terms with the disappearance of her husband Hira Mani when she made her square. Hira made a good living working in furniture and was with a neighbour when he disappeared. Soldiers came to the family house asking about Hira and Manju started to follow them until she was restrained by a neighbour. After her husband disappeared, Manju found some protection by marrying his brother, but her family life then became complicated. Manju's fortunes had changed for the better by 2019. She had deposited the final instalment of compensation in her daughter Alina's bank account. Manju also inherited 10 khatta (half an acre) of land from Hira. She was active in three savings groups, and able to save 200 rupees a month. Manju is still bitter about the loss of her first husband and she wants to see the guilty prosecuted. Manju's most precious gift is her daughter Alina, who is serious, talented and devoted to her mother.



They said that they just wanted some information but I never saw my son again

Belmati lost one of her six sons and two daughters-in-law during the conflict – a devastating loss for one family. The younger of the two women, Kamala, was married to Belmati's son, Jagat Kumari. This square shows Jagat had stomach trouble and was going for treatment when he was seized by Maoists and forced to serve as a porter. The army came for his wife shortly afterwards. Belmati's second daughter-in-law Gita, an active Maoist, was seized by villagers while she was going to a festival and handed over to soldiers. Belmati memorialised Gita in her first embroidered square. In 2016 she had only received 100,000 rupees in compensation. "I remember them all the time, when I'm working or when I celebrate a festival, or when I see other children. I have kept my son's clothes...we want compensation and proper answers...we lost everything."



People say my husband was badly beaten after he was arrested

Anita remembers how her husband Tulsiram Tharu, a farmer, disappeared. "He was arrested in Baskari by police in the morning. They took him to the district jail and kept him for two months." Anita visited him in jail and was overjoyed when she read that he had been freed. But he never reappeared. "The police gave us false news." Life since has been hard for Anita. She works as an indentured labourer for an upper-class landowner and pays back part of what she produces as a tithe. This leaves just enough to make ends meet. She was relieved to receive compensation but wants her husband back. "He was my husband, my life partner. I often think of him. I want the guilty to be punished but I have only one son and I am afraid that they will make him disappear as well."

I'll keep this safe, till you return

Voices of Women Media, Nepal

Memory, Truth & Justice is a project to document, archive and share personal stories of survivors and families of the victims of the armed conflict in Nepal. During 2015-2018, Voices of Women Nepal has documented at least 100 video testimonials of the families of the disappeared. The stories are told through objects that are the only memorabilia the family members of the disappeared have been saving for years, hoping that their disappeared family members will come back home one day. A multimedia project using art, audio, video, and photo medium, the project seeks to preserve and dignify their memories by sharing them with the community at large with the purpose of educating and memorialising. The project has created a website to host these stories, launched a series of events and exhibitions for awareness-raising targeted at the general public and specialised educational material targeting students.



My husband used to carry it all the time whenever he would go to the rice field. It lay idle when he disappeared and got rusted. I have been keeping it safely as his last memento.

Ramkali Devi Tharu
Wife of Guru Prasad Kathariya
Rajapur, Bardiya District



I was taken to Bhairabnath Battalion on Dec 12, 2004. I was wearing this sweater when the army freed me and dropped me off at Banasthali Chowk on February 17, 2005. Swatantra Chaulagain of Bhote Chaur, Sindhupalchok, had given me this sweater while we were in the army camp together. "Please register my name at Amnesty. Don't quit the party if you return safely," he had told me.

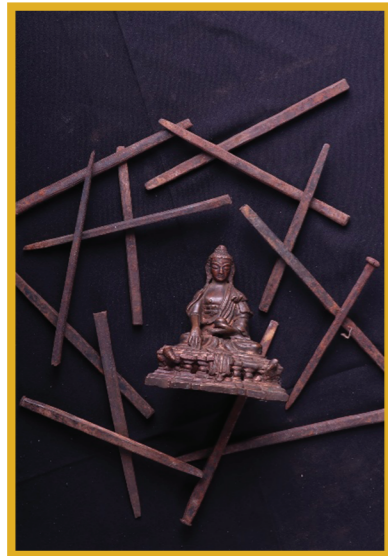
Swatantra Chaulagain is still missing.

Ujjwal Acharya
Kavre District



My son used to recite this Bible at the church while going together with me. I have safely kept this Bible thinking he will return someday. When that happens I will hand it over to him.

Ratna Kumari Mali
Mother of disappeared Baburaja Mali
Lalitpur District



My father used to make Buddha's idols. Why is the army still keeping a man who likes making sculptures as hostage? Will this bring peace to the country?

Nagma Mali
Daughter of disappeared Nanda Gopal Mali
Lalitpur District



When my brother, Ajaya Shahi, earned his first salary he bought this shirt. My brother was disappeared by the Army on July 19, 2004. I have safely kept my brothers' shirt in a separate box.

Bijaya Shahi
Brother of disappeared Ajaya Shahi
Kirtipur



When I was young both my parents went to war. They wrote down stories from the torturous days they must have spent. They also wrote when they missed me. My grandmother cried a lot when she read the diary. So until today I haven't had the courage to open this diary and read it. I have kept it unread, hoping that when I get enough knowledge and strength to take forward my parents' dreams this diary will be a source of my inspiration. .

Sandip Pun
Killed father Surya Prakash Pun, Mother Parampara Gautam
Chunbang, Rukum

NOTES

Afghanistan – Inheritance of Death

1 Afghanistan has been through 4 phases of conflict: The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan 1978-1992, Islamic State of Afghanistan 1992-1996, The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan 1996-2001, The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2002-2021.

Tibet – Contested Realities

2 The banned Tibetan national flag has become a powerful and emotional symbol of resistance and unity for Tibetans the world over. In Tibet displaying or possessing a Tibetan national flag carries the threat of imprisonment.

3 What began with protests against what Tibetans allege is an occupation in 1959 has continued heightening with a series of protests between 1987-1989, and culminating in one of the largest and most sustained protests erupting across the Tibetan plateau in March 2008. The CTA claim that mass-scale surveillance, including the collection of DNA profiles for high-tech tracking reinforce the Chinese authorities' intention to suppress dissent or criticism. (Source: CTA)

4 The 11th Panchen Lama controversy is a dispute about the recognition of the 11th Kunsik Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama is considered the second most important spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama. Following the death of the 10th Panchen Lama, the 14th Dalai Lama recognized Gedhun Choekyi Nyima in 1995. Three days later, the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) abducted the Panchen Lama and his family. Months later, the PRC chose Gyaincain Norbu as its proxy Panchen Lama. (Source: Wikipedia)

Taiwan - Mobile

5 Approximately 160,000 migrants work in the fishing sector, often on deep sea vessels that are not overseen by the Ministry of Labour, a further 250,000 as domestic caretakers, and the remaining 400,000 in various sectors including manufacturing, sanitation, and other jobs that native Taiwanese are reluctant to take. (Source: The Diplomat)

Cambodia – Sketched Pain

6 Is the name that was popularly given to members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) and by extension to the regime through which the CPK ruled Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. The Khmer Rouge army was slowly built up in the jungles of eastern Cambodia during the late 1960s, supported by the North Vietnamese army, the Viet Cong, the Pathet Lao, and the Communist Party of China (CPC). Cambodian genocide is estimated to have led to the death of 1.5 to 2 million people, around 25% of Cambodia's population. (Source: Wikipedia)

7 Many of those who were sent to Kraing Ta Chan in the current Tram Kok district were arrested by subdistrict militia. People could be brought to Kraing Ta Chan day and night, sometimes as many as ten tied together. When prisoners arrived, they were tied together with their hands and biceps restrained. The people who had escorted the prisoners to Kraing Ta Chan were not permitted to enter the compound. Men, women, and children were all detained at Kraing Ta Chan, including whole families. There were two levels of prisoners: minor and serious offenders. The capacity of the prison was unknown. (Source: Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia records)

8 The Community Party of Kampuchea (CPK) referred to itself as the Angkar.

Bangladesh – The Rape of Bangladesh

9 Photographer: Naibuddin Ahmed

10 Photographer: Anjali Lahiri

11 Photographer: Rashid Talukdar

Sri Lanka – Migration and Return

12 At the request of the British planters, Governor Barnes introduced the first wave of plantation workers recruited from South India. It was an arduous journey by foot, train, boat and foot again through rugged terrain and mosquito-ridden jungles. By the time they were settled into meagre housing to toil in the Coffee, Tea and Rubber plantations during the late 1800s, they had endured disease, death and separation from kith and kin. They formed the bulk of the labour force of the plantation sector. Soon after Sri Lanka received Independence, the community was disfranchised and become stateless. They were excluded from development, social welfare and political participation. The statelessness forced a section of the community to return to Tamil Nadu and Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka. To solve the stateless issue a number of amendments were introduced to the Citizenship Act (in 1969, 1988) which finally resolved the issue with amendments in 2003. (Source: ISD Archives)

13 As soon as these migrant workers disembarked from crowded boats at Mannar port, they were moved via Kurunegala to camps in Matale. There they were quarantined for a period of a week or more, examined for infectious diseases like smallpox, cholera or typhoid and vaccinated against them, before being dispatched to Kandy. From there they were dispersed to other locations. (Source: ISD archives)

14 The Sirima-Shastri Pact was an agreement that was signed between Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, and Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Prime Minister of India, on 30 October 1964. Officially, it was known as Agreement on Persons of Indian Origin in Ceylon. It was a significant agreement in determining the status and future of people of Indian origin in Ceylon. The central part of the pact was the granting of Ceylonese citizenship to 300,000 of the Indian population in Sri Lanka, while 525,000 would be repatriated to India. It was agreed that the citizenship of the remaining 150,000 Indian residents of Ceylon would be negotiated at a later point. (Source: Wikipedia)

Nepal

15 The Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was signed on 21 November 2006 between the Government of Nepal and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal which brought a formal end to the decade-long Maoist War.

Participating Organizations



Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization, Afghanistan



Tibet Museum, Dharamshala, India



National Human Rights Museum, Taiwan



The Peace Institute, Cambodia



Kdei-Karuna Organisation, Cambodia



Youth for Peace, Cambodia



The Liberation War Museum, Bangladesh



The Herstories Project, Sri Lanka



International Center for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka



Institute of Social Development, Sri Lanka



Network of Families of the Disappeared, Nepal



Voices of Women Media, Nepal

