

Where the War Never Ended: Hauntology and the Post-War Afterlife in Samanth Subramanian's *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* ♣

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Abstract

This article examines the spectral afterlife of Sri Lanka's civil war through a reading of Samanth Subramanian's *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* (2014). Drawing on the hauntological framework developed by Jacques Derrida and expanded by Mark Fisher and Merlin Coverley, it explores how trauma, erasure, and surveillance continue to shape Sri Lanka's postwar landscape. The analysis focuses on spatial and symbolic registers of haunting—erased cemeteries, repurposed monuments, militarized zones, and national iconography—that embed violence into the everyday. Through close attention to narrative testimonies, public memory, and the affective politics of fear, the article situates Subramanian's work as a counter-archive that disrupts official narratives of reconciliation. In tracing how the ghosts of ethnic division inhabit space, gesture, and silence, the article highlights hauntology's relevance for understanding the unfinished aftermath of conflict and the spectral condition of peace.

Keywords: hauntology, memory, ethnic conflict, Sri Lankan civil war, travel narrative, Samanth Subramanian, *This Divided Island*

Introduction

On May 17, 2009, then-President Mahinda Rajapaksa addressed the nation to mark what he described as a historic triumph over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), effectively signalling the conclusion of Sri Lanka's 26-year-long civil conflict. In his speech, he emphasized the centrality of reclaiming the country's territorial unity and reinforcing its sovereign identity:

Over the last thirty years, the LTTE has killed many people Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims - many have been killed. The war against the LTTE is not a war against Tamil people Our aim was to liberate our Tamil people from the clutches of the LTTE Our heroic forces have sacrificed their lives to protect Tamil civilians Protecting the Tamil speaking people of this country is my responsibility That is my duty. All the people of this country should live in safety without fear and suspicion. All should live with equal rights That is my aim. Let us all get together and build up this nation (Tamil ends) (Rajapakshe 2009)

However, more than a decade after the formal end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka remains deeply affected by its legacy, haunted by unresolved grievances and a fragile social fabric. The memory of the conflict lingers, not only in the memorials and physical scars left on the landscape but also in the continuing struggles that Sri Lankans face today. While many accounts focus on the state's failure to address the rights of minority communities, Nira Wickramasinghe's *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age* (2015) provides a nuanced perspective. She juxtaposes Tamil claims with the broader political, social, and economic demands of other

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groups and traces the origins of these complexities back to the colonial period. Wickramasinghe critiques the nationalist rhetoric that fuelled the war, noting that “the debate about who came first, who was the original inhabitant, what expanse of land was under Tamil control, and hence who had more claims to part or totality of the land was a late development” (272). This framing reveals how modern conflict was shaped not by ancient animosities, but by relatively recent political constructions of identity and belonging.

Events such as the 2022 economic crisis and the targeted attacks on Muslim communities, including the violent incident at a chapel, further suggest that the promise of lasting peace remains deeply fragile. This article examines *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* (2014), a powerful narrative by Samanth Subramanian, an Indian writer and journalist based in London, that delves into the haunted landscape of post-war Sri Lanka. Subramanian, the author of *Following Fish* (2010) and *A Dominant Character* (2020), is a prominent voice in narrative journalism, with his work featured in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *WIRED*, among others. The book offers a powerful counter-narrative to official declarations of reconciliation. Published in 2014, the book explores the unresolved afterlife of the war through interviews, observations, and travel across Sri Lanka.

This article situates *This Divided Island* within the conceptual framework of hauntology, a term coined by Jacques Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* (1993), to explore how post-conflict Sri Lanka is inhabited by spectre of its violent past—ghosts that refuse to be exorcised by official narratives of reconciliation. The concept explores how the past persists within the present, much like a haunting, challenging the notion that historical events are ever truly “over”. This article reads Subramanian’s documentation of civilian voices, war-torn geographies, and suppressed commemorative practices as spectral signs of a conflict that continues to shape everyday life. The war’s conclusion may have ended military hostilities, but Subramanian shows how unresolved ethnic divides and state-sanctioned amnesia produce a nation that is structurally haunted. Drawing on key insights from hauntological theory and contemporary post-conflict studies, the study will examine how *This Divided Island* performs the work of mourning by giving voice to the silenced and mapping the psychic terrain of a nation caught between remembrance and forgetting.

To explore this, the article proceeds in three parts: first, a close reading of *This Divided Island* and its depiction of spectral trauma; second, a theoretical overview of hauntology and its application to post-conflict Sri Lanka; and third, a discussion of how space, memory, and state ideology reveal the limits of reconciliation in the island’s postwar condition.

Subramanian’s *This Divided Island*: Bearing Witness to a Postwar Haunting

Within the framework of Sri Lanka’s post-conflict literature, hauntology facilitates the study of ethnically-inflicted violence and unprocessed trauma in Sri Lankan literature. Works such as Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* (2000), Anuk Arudpragasam’s *The Story of a Brief Marriage* (2016), Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* (1994), Nayomi Munaweera’s *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012), and Rohini Mohan’s *The Seasons of Trouble* (2014) deal with the emotional and political impacts of the war. Roma Tearne’s *Mosquito* (2007) and V.V. Ganeshanathan’s *Love Marriage* (2008) explored memory, displacement, and trauma, illustrating how deeply the conflict haunts those caught in its crossfire. Regardless of the narrative form and positionality, these novels and nonfiction works are united in their focus on the unresolved violence, amnesia of the collective history, and the shattered hope for reconciliation. In this regard, Samanth Subramanian’s *This Divided Island* (2014) is distinctive with its journalistic style, especially in its portrayal of the violence’s socio-political context and the ethics of narrating the neglected stories of post-war Sri Lanka.

Samanth Subramanian’s *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* (2014) is a nonfiction narrative that documents the lingering effects of Sri Lanka’s civil war through travel

writing, oral testimony, and journalistic observation. Having first visited the island in 2004 and then returning in 2011—two years after the war’s declared end—Subramanian frames his second journey “in the spirit of a forensics gumshoe visiting an arson site, to examine the ashes and guess at how the fire caught and spread... but also to see if any embers remained” (20). This metaphor positions him not as a passive observer but as a witness searching for the war’s residue—traumas that smolder beneath the surface.

The book is structured in four parts—“The Terror,” “The North,” “The Faith,” and “Endgames”—which chart overlapping temporalities: the pre-civil war period (1948–1983), the war years (1983–2009), and the ongoing aftermath. Rather than presenting a chronological account, Subramanian composes a mosaic of personal stories, testimonies, and spaces. His subjects include Tamil civilians, former LTTE fighters, army personnel, Buddhist monks, and members of the Sri Lankan diaspora. Through this constellation of voices, the narrative becomes a literary archive of haunting, revealing trauma not only in memory but in erasure, silence, and surveillance. Subramanian notes: “I heard stories of individuals—fantastic or tragic or melancholic or even happy stories, stories that had human propositions, and that could be multiplied in my head to gain a larger truth” (16). What emerges is a nation permeated by the spectral remains of war: vanished cemeteries, disappeared persons, and silenced commemorations. These are not just the byproducts of conflict but signals of what Derrida calls the “non-being” that persists—the presence of something that is no longer materially there but cannot be forgotten.

The book refuses to neatly resolve the question of whether Sri Lanka has truly transitioned into peace. Instead, it captures a nation in suspended mourning, where trauma is displaced rather than addressed. Subramanian’s careful attention to the affective residue of war—the grief of survivors, the quiet dignity of the displaced, the tension in public spaces—recasts his text as more than reportage. It is a hauntological travelogue that listens to what the state tries to suppress. By foregrounding testimony and subtle forms of resistance, *This Divided Island* becomes an ethical intervention, documenting not just what happened, but how people live with what happened—and what cannot be fully said. In doing so, the book refuses the closure of peace, instead illuminating how the past remains embedded in the present, like embers beneath ash.

The Concept of Hauntology and the Afterlife of Conflict

“A spectre is haunting Sri Lanka—the spectre of ethnic divide.” This rephrasing of Marx and Engels’ iconic line from *The Communist Manifesto* captures the unresolved tensions that continue to shape post-war Sri Lanka. While Marx’s spectre referred to the revolutionary potential of communism, Jacques Derrida reimagines it in *Spectres of Marx* (1993) as a metaphor for unresolved historical legacies—ghosts that linger, unsettle, and disturb the present. For Derrida, these ghosts pervade politics, culture, and daily life: “to be is to be haunted” (qtd. in Coverley 8). Originally grounded in the unfulfilled promises of communism, Derrida’s concept can be extended to examine the persistent issues and complexities surrounding Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict. Hauntology challenges the notion that history is linear or complete; instead, it draws attention to what is absent yet present, to silences, erasures, and lingering traumas that shape the present through spectral forms.

This framework is particularly suited to post-conflict Sri Lanka, where official narratives of national unity are repeatedly contradicted by the lived experiences of Tamils. While the government has consistently denied civilian deaths during the final stages of the war, independent estimates—including those by the UN—report over 40,000 civilian fatalities (Wickramasinghe 364; Subramanian 20). In 2020, the state belatedly acknowledged the disappearance of over 20,000 people, offering only death certificates without due investigation or justice (“Sri Lanka Civil War,” BBC News). In contrast, the Ministry of Defence’s

Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis (2006–2009) claims the military followed a “Zero Civilian Casualty” policy, insisting it took “extensive measures to keep collateral damage at a minimum” (85).

Samanth Subramanian captures this denial in stark terms, observing that Sri Lanka was “pretending that it had been suddenly scrubbed clean of violence. But it wasn’t, of course. By some fundamental law governing the conservation of violence, it was now erupting outside the battlefield, in strange and unpredictable ways” (10). His insight resonates with Stephen Brown’s assertion that postwar periods often fail to resolve underlying tensions: “Conflict does not terminate immediately after the cessation of armed hostilities... they can often continue for a long period of time” (Brown 2005).

In this context, hauntology is not just a theory of the past—it reveals how the past is deliberately made to disappear while still persisting beneath the surface. Mark Fisher, in *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), extends Derrida’s concept to cultural and political conditions marked by “lost futures”—unfulfilled promises of modernity and peace. In postwar Sri Lanka, Tamil communities experience such stalled futurity through displacement, detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), and constant surveillance. The 2020 issuance of death certificates without proper investigations, the ongoing militarization of the North, and the state’s silence around mass graves exemplify a nation unwilling to mourn, let alone reconcile. Merlin Coverley furthers this view in *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past* (2020), arguing that haunting is an inherently political act. It gives voice to those who have been deliberately erased. This is especially relevant to Sri Lanka’s history of “white van” abductions, a campaign of enforced disappearances stretching back to the 1980s. Leena Manimekalai’s documentary *White Van Stories* records testimonies of families left in limbo, as she notes, “there is absolutely no news” of those who vanished—only fear remains (Doyle para. 6). According to UN reports, Sri Lanka, after Iraq, has the highest number of enforced disappearances (“Sri Lanka: UN rights chief urges progress” 2024).

These hauntings challenge the official narrative of reconciliation, which is constructed largely through majoritarian memory. The state’s glorification of Sinhala-Buddhist history and its erasure of Tamil suffering reveal a spectral regime that cannot suppress what it refuses to confront. Even ancient myths—such as the *Mahavamsa*’s tale of Prince Vijaya or the heroic framing of King Duttugemunu’s victory over the Tamil King Elara—have been reanimated in modern politics. During the civil war, President Mahinda Rajapaksa was often likened to Duttugemunu, while the LTTE leader Prabhakaran was cast as Elara. In this way, nationalist mythology is redeployed to justify violence and render Tamil identity perpetually suspect. Hauntology, then, is not merely a metaphor for absence but a method of reading how violence persists through selective memory, denial, and symbolic displacement. In this sense, Subramanian’s *This Divided Island* functions as a counter-archive: a text that restores voice to the silenced and insists that the past has not passed. Instead, it continues to erupt in testimonies, in silences, and in the ghosted geographies of postwar Sri Lanka.

The Spectre of Memory: Embodiment, Testimony, and Affective Haunting

In the aftermath of political violence and civil war, memory becomes both a burden and a battleground. As hauntology reminds us, the past never fully disappears—it returns in fragmented, residual, and often unresolved ways. Hauntology, as developed by Derrida and extended by Mark Fisher and Merlin Coverley, emphasizes that haunting is not just a metaphor but a condition: the spectral past continues to shape the present through absence, repetition, and emotional residue.

In *This Divided Island*, Subramanian captures this not through abstract theorizing, but through careful attention to what remains—stories, silences, and physical objects that bear the imprint of loss. Martin Hägglund’s reflection that “to inscribe something is, first of all, an act of

memory. Regardless of what, to whom, or why I write, my words become traces of the past at the very moment when they are imprinted (50)". This particularly resonant in the context of Sri Lanka's postwar landscape. Subramanian's interviews foreground this act of inscription, where survivors remember not birthdays or celebrations, but moments of disappearance, displacement, and death: "not birthdays or wedding anniversaries, but dates of disappearances, or of death by mortar, or of evacuation" (251). Here, the very act of writing or speaking becomes an act of memorialization, a way to resist erasure. But memory, especially in the context of trauma, is not linear. It is marked by rupture, repetition, and emotional residue. The body, as both witness and archive, carries the residue of violence—of what was lost and what cannot be recovered.

Subramanian's interviews with civilians reflect this fractured temporality. A particularly poignant example is Subramanian's encounter with T. Sanathanan, an artist and academic at the University of Jaffna, who curated an exhibit of memory. He curated an exhibition where people were asked to bring any object that reminded them of the past 25 years. Subramanian writes, "People told him about the slain daughters whose dolls they had brought with them...about the hut that had been reduced, by shelling, to the ash he was holding. Fishermen brought him bottles of seawater, representing the ocean upon which...they were no longer permitted to sail" (100). Hence, bodies are haunted by the spectre of memories, of death, of loss, of love, and by inscribing their memories into accessible objects, like Sanathanan, they can be passed on. Through this curatorial act, Sanathanan turns memory into materiality. The exhibition becomes a counter-archive to the state's narrative of progress and reconciliation, giving voice to the silenced and testimony to the disappeared. Such efforts challenge the official amnesia often found in post-conflict regimes and insist on the embodied, affective nature of memory. Hauntology, in this sense, operates not only through institutions or ideology but through personal acts of remembrance.

But memory is not limited to objects. It is inscribed in bodies and gestures, through trauma that reappears in posture, speech, and fear. In post-war Sri Lanka, fear is not merely a psychological consequence; it is institutionalized, regulated, and weaponized. Indeed, the politics of fear has significantly challenged their social lives because it influences activities, meanings, routines, and perspectives. However, the abstract notion of fear is a necessary component of life without which humans could not survive. Altheide, in his seminal work, *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* (2006), argues that —fear is not a negative notion even in a political structure (5). Indeed, fear is fundamental to a political framework; if individuals do not fear the repercussions of any criminal conduct, then force becomes futile. As a result, the state uses propaganda to promote these 'positive' fears. They use the media, websites, posters, memorials, monuments, and other means to spread their manifestations of fear or the consequences of any criminal activity. However, it becomes a negative, politicised fear when it is "promoted and exploited by leaders for their survival and policies rather than that of their audiences" (8). Thus, the situation contributes to the expansion of the politics of fear. However, the functionality of the politics of fear is based on the nature of people whom the state constitutes as "threats—namely, "outsiders" or "the other" (9). In the case of post-conflict Sri Lanka, the Tamil survivors are manifested as the 'other' or the 'outsider', and the Sri Lankan extremists are the perpetrators of the politics of fear. Fear, in this context, becomes a haunting in its own right—an affect that organizes space, conduct, and social life. Subramanian captures this through the story of Mr. M, a friend and interviewee, who recounts how even minor activities such as organizing a social event, holding a meeting, or speaking freely required police permission and could attract military suspicion. Mr. M recalls a university meeting on digitizing a library being interrupted by a colonel who accused the faculty of commemorating the LTTE. This kind of performative control reflects how memory, fear, and power intersect in the mundane rhythms of post-war life. Here, Subramanian notes that Tamil civilians, especially in the North and East, continue

to live under a kind of performative surveillance. Thus, life under military watch becomes theatrical—one must control their movements, language, and facial expressions to avoid suspicion. He opines:

Under the unrelenting gaze of the army, life became an act to be performed for the satisfaction of the audience of soldiers. A walk must not appear like a skulk; a package tucked under one's arm must not look suspicious; conversation must be sanitised; thoughts of anger or rebellion must not show transparently on one's face. This is no way to live. (Subramanian 126-127)

In this sense, memory in post-war Sri Lanka is not merely a recollection of the past but a lived, embodied condition shaped by fear, surveillance, and structural marginalization. Subramanian's *This Divided Island* illustrates how such memories, far from being dormant, circulate as spectral presences—persistently challenging state narratives of closure and unsettling the illusion of peace with the unresolved legacies of violence.

Hauntology through Fear: Memorials, Monuments, and the Spectral Politics of Space

In postwar Sri Lanka, memory is not only contested through narratives and testimonies but also through space—how it is controlled, symbolized, and erased. Hauntology becomes particularly resonant in this spatial dimension, where the past is not just remembered but also strategically reconfigured through monuments, military architecture, and official symbolism. These strategies serve to script reconciliation on the state's terms, often reinforcing majoritarian dominance while obscuring Tamil grief. As Merlin Coverley writes, “to be is to be haunted” (2020), and for Tamil civilians, this haunting is not abstract—it is lived daily through the presence of militarization, surveillance, and systemic control. Subramanian records how the aftermath of war transformed everyday life into a performance. He demonstrates how; “A walk must not appear like a skulk; a package tucked under one's arm must not look suspicious; conversation must be sanitized; thoughts of anger or rebellion must not show transparently on one's face. This is no way to live” (Subramanian 126). Civilians needed police permission for gatherings; fear dictated posture, expression, and speech. Spaces like the Menik Farm displacement camp, dismantled only in 2012, and the white-van abduction campaigns illustrate how fear shaped both public and private geographies. Compounding this was the systematic process of Sinhalization - “the process of replacing Tamil culture, language, and history with that of the Sinhalese” (Anandakugan 2020). Tamil monuments were destroyed or replaced, signboards rewritten in Sinhala, and town names altered to reflect Sinhala traditions. These strategies have deeply distorted Tamil claims to space, identity, and history.

In post-conflict societies, spatial structures such as memorials, monuments, and public spaces are more than passive containers of history—they are politically charged sites where memory is managed, contested, and often suppressed. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology, this section argues that space itself becomes haunted by unresolved histories, functioning as a terrain where the spectral remains of the past continue to intrude upon the present. In the Sri Lankan context, these spatial markers of memory are not only shaped by violence but also by attempts to erase or re-narrativize that violence through state-sponsored majoritarian ideologies. Subramanian's *This Divided Island* (2014) offers a compelling illustration of how the state manipulates physical space to manage historical memory.

One of the most striking examples is the destruction of the Tamil cemetery in Kopay, a site that once commemorated LTTE combatants. Subramanian writes, “The Sri Lankan army had erased the cemetery once the war was won. In its place, an army base had been constructed, right on top of the bones of bygone Tigers” (235). This act is not merely an architectural replacement but a symbolic overwriting of a counter-memory. The army base becomes a paradoxical monument, one that marks the place of memory through its violent absence. Another such demolition case was the destruction of Prabhakaran's ancestral home in April 2010 in Malady

Lane. After the ethnic conflict, Jaffna was safe for travel, and people came in droves to visit Prabhakaran's house. The Tamils considered it a pilgrimage. The army, however, was concerned that it would become a shrine and, therefore, demolished it. Subramanian states, —the army worried that Prabhakaran would be deified and that the house would become something of a shrine, so it was knocked down. However, the visitors continued to come, now pocketing a fistful of mud or rubble as a souvenir (239). These actions reveal a deeper politics of fear: the Tamil fear of being forgotten and the Sinhalese fear of militant resurgence. In both cases, the state seeks to exorcise the spectre of memory—not by confronting it, but by constructing an alternate history on its ruins.

As Subramanian's narrative reveals, haunting is not confined to formally designated memorials. Everyday spaces—hotels, banks, street corners—are also imbued with latent spectrality. The trauma of past violence is not always marked by plaques or monuments; it lives in the textures of the ordinary, in sites once bombed or surveilled. Subramanian's encounter with Indi, a Sri Lankan-born blogger who had returned from Canada, illustrates this. As they walk through Colombo, Indi casually maps the city through its history of violence: "You see that hotel, the Nippon Hotel? A bomb blew up a bus next to it... And this is Central Bank building... The Tigers bombed it in 1996. They drove a truck of explosives through this gate..." (24). Here, hauntology emerges not only in what is absent, but in what is insistently present—memories attached to place, narrated as casual knowledge, yet rooted in trauma. These mnemonic geographies suggest that even neutral urban infrastructure carries ghostly residue. When saturated with majoritarian imagery, these spaces reinforce a singular national identity at the cost of shared historical memory.

Similar to the fear evoked by monuments, memorials, and militarised governance, the national flag tremendously influences people's psyches because it represents the nation in its ideological form. Thus, the national flag becomes a political space representing a nation's fundamental ideals, history, and identity. It is a symbolic representation of a country's consciousness. Flags are not fear spaces, but their interpretation and the context in which they are used can impact how they are perceived, including whether they evoke fear or other emotions. In the case of Sri Lanka, the national flag remains a disputed notion. For instance, the lion loudly symbolises the Sinhala race, and the sword represents the island nation's sovereignty. Similarly, the four Bo leaves on the flag, on the other hand, represent the majority faith, Buddhism, because it was under the pupil tree that Gautama Buddha finally achieved enlightenment. The vertical lines, green and orange, signify the minority Muslim and Tamil ethnicity. Under such circumstances, as Subramanian comments in *This Divided Island* (2014), flags become "a space that is policed by the nation and the particular organization" (44). Subramanian records an instance that problematises the Sri Lankan national flag concept on his visit to the Independence Memorial Hall in Colombo. His observation asserts that the Sri Lankan national flag is a "loud signal of majoritarianism- an affirmation of Sri Lanka's Sinhalese Buddhist core and its triumph in the war" (23). This observation on the national flag constitutes a primary source that essentially exemplifies the execution of politics of fear in Sri Lanka.

On a social level, the testimonial account from Mahesh remarks on the enforced reiteration of Buddhism after the war. During their travels in Colombo, Mahesh draws Subramanian's attention to a public transportation bus adorned with the name and photograph of Sri Lanka's president, a pink flower image, and a slogan written exclusively in Sinhalese. The slogan translates as "This is the kingdom of Gautama Buddha" (29). Mahesh further notes the proliferation of new Buddhist shrines along the roadside. However, beyond the ritualized display of Buddhist nationalism, Mahesh critically observes the emerging practice of worshipping monks rather than the Buddha, which became more prevalent after the conclusion of the Ethnic conflict. Subramanian quotes Mahesh: "This whole practice of worshipping the monks themselves, rather than the Buddha—this was never done before" (28). This

transformation suggests not only religious revivalism, but also a merging of spiritual authority with political power. Through such saturation of religious imagery and ritualized nationalism, space becomes a contested medium for memory. From razed cemeteries to rebranded public monuments and ideologically charged signage, postwar Sri Lanka emerges not as a blank slate, but as a spectral palimpsest—layered with absence, erasure, and symbolic violence. Subramanian’s narrative deftly maps this haunted terrain, revealing how space itself becomes a witness to unresolved history.

Conclusion

Even after the military victory of 2009, the spectre of ethnic division continues to haunt Sri Lanka—not simply as a remnant of past conflict, but as a future threat projected into the present. In this spectral temporality, the Tamil is imagined both as a memory to be erased and a danger yet to come. This dual haunting—of what has been and what might be—ensures that ethnic tension remains embedded in the everyday. Hauntology, as theorized by Derrida and expanded by Coverley, captures this condition wherein the past and future converge as ghostly presences in the present—felt “either through repetition or anticipation” (Coverley 11).

Despite state narratives of reconciliation, the structural realities of Sinhalization—through language, surveillance, monuments, and spatial control—reveal how national healing has been orchestrated through silencing. The continued assertion of Sinhala-Buddhist supremacy in public symbols, flags, and memorials leaves little space for plural identities or alternative histories. As Subramanian writes, “How could any Tamil—even a Tamil who believed fully in the notion of a whole Sri Lankan—not chafe at being excluded ... first by physical barriers and then by the barriers of language?” (314). His travelogue thus becomes a counter-archive, a map of spectral traces that reveal how the past lives on not only in memory, but in fear, space, and silence.

For the spectre of ethnic discrimination to be exorcised, Sri Lanka must reckon not only with the events of the war, but with the deeper ideological architectures that enabled and continue to perpetuate exclusion. Reconciliation cannot be achieved through symbolic gestures alone—it requires the dismantling of linguistic, spatial, and epistemic hierarchies that render Tamil identities perpetually spectral. Subramanian’s *This Divided Island* insists that peace is not a finished state but a haunted process. Only by acknowledging plural pasts and making room for contested narratives can the nation move from spectral coexistence to inclusive healing.

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