Promoting Transitional Justice through the Politics of the Everyday:

Inclusive Avenues to Social Movement Activism [1]

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Abstract

Social movement resistance is typically conceived of as public collective action. In this paper, I argue for an expanded understanding of movement resistance as outlined by James Scott, who stresses individual resistance. Building on Scott, I suggest that individual resistance can become collective (albeit private) resistance that at an aggregate finds an outlet in a counterpublic—a critical counternarrative—that challenges heteronormative discourses. Performing a feminist re-reading on a women's group, this paper argues that everyday conversation hinging on political concerns may be viewed as a form of political engagement, and if it is oppositional, contributes to social movement resistance. The women's group the Southern Mothers' Front disbanded after four years of organizing. Yet former members continued to engage in political conservations that the government sought to quiet. This paper redefines former Southern Mothers' Front members' conversations as a form of collective resistance that fed into a counterpublic that challenged state discourses, although not never taking center-stage in public debate. This paper calls attention to these women's post-organization resistance, which prevented the total normalization of state violence by refusing to acquiesce to the state's

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version of history and demanding transitional justice. This paper contributes to participatory and deliberative democracy literature as well as social movement scholarship.

Keywords: Social movements; Resistance; Democracy; Sri Lanka; Activism

Introduction

Sri Lanka underwent a decades-long civil war from 1983 to 2009 that involved the state—dominated by the majority Sinhalese—and an armed militant separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), made up of members of the country's largest minority group, the Tamils. While the main theatres of war were Tamil-dominated areas, the Sinhalese community experienced a period of violence from 1987 to 1991 during the reign of terror (Malik, et al. 2009). This occurred under the government of the United National Party (UNP), when state forces retaliated against a violent insurrection by the Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna (People's Liberation Front) (JVP), a small Sinhalese nationalist party. The JVP engaged in widespread violence against state forces and civilians to express anger over the invitation of Indian peacekeeping troops to end fighting between the Sri Lankan military and LTTE. The JVP condemned the UNP for inviting foreign troops, seeing this as a violation of Sri Lankan sovereignty. The UNP-government retaliated against the JVP with unrestrained violence against not only members of the JVP, but innocent young people across the Sinhalese-majority south of the country. Thousands of civilians were forcibly disappeared or killed in the reign of terror (de Mel 2001). The government recognizes some 15,000 disappearances (Inquiry, 1995). Human rights organizations and journalists suggest it may be as many as 40,000 to 60,000 disappearances (Gunaratna 1990, 269, de Alwis 2001, 210). This violence was the catalyst for a

corporatist women's group known as the Southern Mothers' Front (SMF).[2] In 1990, two men members of parliament (MPs) from the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), the main political rival of the UNP, co-founded the SMF. The SMF engaged in regular public protests against the UNP-government for the disappearances and/or murders of their children (de Mel 2001, de Alwis 2001). In 1994, the SLFP took control of government as the head of the coalition government, the People's Alliance. This opened new political opportunities to the SMF. Yet the SMF as a national organization dissolved, a puzzling move when their affiliated party was in power (Pinto Jayawardena and Kodikara 2002, de Alwis 2001, Samuel 2006, de Mel 2001).

In this paper, I ask: To contribute to human rights and democracy social movements, must participation be in public collective actions? I reconsider everyday conversation on political concerns as political engagement, and if such conversation is oppositional, as part of social movement resistance. The evidence for former SMF members' conversations comes from fieldwork in Colombo, Sri Lanka, conducted in 2017. Kumudini Samuel, a Sri Lankan feminist researcher and activist with the Women & Media Collective, stresses the role of the women's conversations, which she describes as "political work."[3] Scholars have been perplexed by the SMF for folding when the SLFP entered office (Pinto Jayawardena and Kodikara 2002, de Alwis 2001, Samuel 2006, de Mel 2001). Despite the organization dissolving, many of its former members engaged in individual resistance and there are examples of former members moving

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[2] The Northern Mothers' Front was a Tamil women's group that protested enforced disappearances of young Tamil men that organized from 1984 to 1987 (Samuel 2006).

[3] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

into other sectors of civil society, which has been well-documented elsewhere (de Mel 2001). This paper focuses on those women who did not move into other organizations.

I build upon the theoretical insights of James Scott (1985, 1990), who argues that private, everyday resistance matters because individual resistance forms the basis for the possibility of mass public collective action and it means something to those who engage in these actions. I further argue that private resistance can sometimes lead to a kind of collective action, albeit likely asynchronous. I interweave insights from feminist scholarship on the constructed nature of the public and private spheres and highlight the necessity of citizen engagement from participatory and deliberative democracy. The findings from this paper are relevant for social movement scholars and others interested in social change. This research aims to broaden understandings of social movement resistance to make movement participation as inclusive as possible and to ensure that scholars capture all relevant forms of political engagement.

After enacting the demands of the SMF, the SLFP-government sought to dismiss the reign of terror, putting it symbolically behind the country.[4] I demonstrate this through an examination of Chandrika Kumaratunga's presidency (1994-2005), a win owed in part to the SMF (de Alwis 1997, C. F. Torne 2017a, 191-193). Although the SMF disbanded when the SLFP came to power, a counterpublic to remember the reign of terror was embodied in the conversations of former SMF members as they went about their lives. Counterpublics, or "the places, spaces, or means" wherein marginalized people construct their identities and

[4] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

communities and strategize ways to transform society, strengthen democracies by providing safe spaces for those outside of the mainstream (Friedman 2017, 4, Hernandez 1997). The narratives spoken by former members of the SMF conceivably fed into a counternarrative, since they discussed their disappeared children, a move that ran against the wishes of the state that sought to move on from the reign of terror.[5]

This paper performs a feminist re-reading of the SMF's post-public collective organizing to explore the constructed binary between collective and individual forms of resistance. This re-reading is based on the extant feminist literature that disrupts constructions of a distinct public-private divide. I argue that collective action is often construed as taking place in the public but suggest that individual resistance within the private sphere may lead to private and asynchronous, collective action, therein constituting a movement. I set this paper in the vein of Sasha Roseneil's *Common Women, Uncommon Practices* (2000), a feminist re-reading of the women's anti-nuclear organizing at Greenham Common, a military base in the UK. In a similar vein to Greenham, the women formerly with SMF disrupted understandings of gender, of what mothers were "supposed" to do and disturbed constructions of public and private. Through sharing memories of the disappeared in conversations in the "in-between-ness" of the public and private spheres that make up daily life – homes of friends, the marketplace and similar locales – former SMF members challenged binary constructions of collective and individual resistances and pointed to the significance of everyday politics.

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[5] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Likewise, the literatures of the politics of memory and transitional justice focus on helping countries collectively heal and/or “move on” from atrocities (Antze and Lambeck 1996, Barahona de Brito, González-Enríquez and Aguilar 2001, Bakiner 2015). Communities and smaller sub-sections within the nation-state also generate their own politics of memory (Hamilton 2003). Narratives about the community help members to both understand themselves, their communities and their roles in the community. Such storytelling is vital to sustaining democracy since knowing your place furthers participation in politics (Hernandez 1997, 25). This echoes participatory and deliberative democracy advocates who promote engagement and contestation to sustain the vitality of democracies (C. Pateman 1970, Mutz 2006, Klofstad 2011, Wolfe and Ikeda 2010, Calhoun, McQuarrie and Walker 2015). Highlighting daily conversations moves away from the top-down turn in participatory democracy and the systems turn in deliberative democracy that lean toward “citizen’s input” and “the politics of expertise,” to highlight grassroots democracy (Bherer, Dufour and Montambeault 2016, 227, Moore 2017, 11).

This paper proceeds as follows. First, it examines the social movement literature that prizes public collective action over individual forms of political activities but is increasingly challenged by those who point to the importance of everyday resistance. In the second section, I suggest that the collective versus individual debate relates to the public-private divide that has been disrupted by feminists, which suggests a less than distinct binary of collective-individual resistance. The third section constitutes the bulk of this paper and analyzes the political conversations by the SMF alongside an assessment of Kumaratunga’s presidency to demonstrate how the government sought to move away from the reign of terror. The

conclusion pushes for greater attention and appreciation to the politics of the everyday and a broadening of our understanding of social movement resistance. It promotes the legacy of the SMF in which even after the organization dissolved, women continued to participate politically.

Collective and individual actions in social movements

This section overviews a debate among social movement scholars over what constitutes movement work. Collective action in the public sphere has traditionally been understood as the main task of social movements. Since movement actors seek to draw attention to their causes to push for changes in policymaking, demands can be achieved efficiently by directly pressuring officials to make changes, or by convincing the broader public of desired policy changes (Ferree, et al. 2002, Kriesi 2014). Protests grab people's attention and efficiently convey movement demands through chants, signs and other visual representations, most notably bodies in the streets (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004).

Over recent decades, understandings of social movement activism and resistance has expanded to include everyday acts of resistance performed by individuals (Scott 1985, 1990, Budgeon 2001, Hernández and Rehman 2002, Sen 2017, Cox 2018). Individual resistance is less effective and efficient at meeting movement goals compared to collective action. Everyday acts of resistance may empower individuals, but foregoes broad agendas for social change (Kelly 2015, 83). Notably, "slacktivism," or digital activism that tends to be individually based, requires little effort, such as signing on online petition (Dennis 2019). However, actions in public spaces are not feasible for everyone. Some work long hours to make ends meet and/or care for family members. Resources such as time and money are linked with political engagement, with

greater amounts increasing civic organizing feasibility (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Edwards and McCarthy 2004, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Others have disabilities that prevent them from leaving the home or hospital to engage in public protests. In some countries or parts of the country, there may be no opportunities for public collective actions due to the threat of violence or an individual may find themselves a political minority—with no locals sharing their aims—with whom to organize alongside. Not everyone has the means to travel to join a protest. For these reasons and more, if the bar for social movements is public protest, many are left out.

Much of the debate about what constitutes social movement activism centers over collective versus individual actions. Underlying this debate is where actions take place – either in the public or private sphere. Yet if many people engage in the same form of resistance in the private sphere, this may constitute a sort of collective action. It differs from a public protest in that it is not necessarily coordinated, nor taking place synchronously. Nevertheless, it offers those facing barriers to street protests the opportunity to participate in social movements. By expanding what constitutes movement work, scholars can capture a wider range of activities that are inherently political and that lead—if in a less than direct way—toward changing policy outcomes.

The public-private divide

In this section, I highlight feminist scholarship that has disrupted a hard public-private divide by suggesting an ambiguous construction of public and private. This clarifies the debate among social movement scholars regarding everyday individual resistance and public collective

action. Discursively, women are associated with the domestic sphere and men with the public sphere, with the former construed as nonpolitical, or outside of politics, and the latter seen as the exclusive site of politics (Hawkesworth 2012, C. Pateman 1988). The gendering and severing off from one another of the public and private spheres has been debunked in feminist scholarship as ideological (Fraser 1998, Hernandez 1997, Gal 2004). Instead, feminists generally view the public-private as blurred rather than divided. All social processes were at one time public, including the notion that the family should be cordoned off from the state, as promoted in political liberalism (Benhabib 1998, Dietz 1985). Feminists more often view the public and private spheres as “mutually constituting,” unable to exist without the other (Peterson 2017, C. Pateman 1989, Burgess 2016, 141).

Feminists also transgress the public-private binary through the assertion that the “personal is political,” which emphasizes that politics – understood as power relations – operates within households (Honig 1998, Young 1998, 441, Hernandez 1997). Until feminism, the domestic sphere was deemed beyond “the realm of [state or legal and social] justice,” meaning that oppressions inside the home were ignored (Benhabib 1998, 87, Young 1998). Arguing that the personal is political does not necessarily break distinctions between the public and private spheres but rather dispels the notion that only the public is political (Young 1998). The personal as political speaks to how all issues qualify for public discussion, even those issues that happen inside the home (Benhabib 1998). In claiming this, feminists complicate the notion of public-political as equivalent to private-nonpolitical.

There is a similar lack of disciplinary consensus over whether civic engagement is public or private, what Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards (1996) call the “civil society paradox” (p.

38). This stems from liberal political theorists' view of the private as the nonstate-controlled areas of the business sector and civil society (C. Pateman 1988, 1989). Many political scientists working in the tradition of liberalism continue to view civil society as part of the private sphere (Foley and Edwards 1996, Putnam 2000, Fukuyama 2001, Lang 2012) while others classify civil society as part of the public sphere given that these efforts are not part of the domestic sphere (Habermas [1962] 1989, 1992 , Rawls [1993] 1996, Lang 2012).

What these differing constructions point to is that each of us lives out our "private lives" in public spaces, such as stores, movie theaters, parks, restaurants and town and city centers, a process of queering – or blurring – hard public-private distinctions (Davidoff 1998, 180, Weber 1999). Conversations among social circles – such as performed by former members of the SMF – are beset with public-private confusion. As Rüdiger Smitt-Beck and Oana Lup (2013) put it, much of the literature views locations where ordinary people engage in everyday political talk – such as bars, homes, job sites and civic clubs – as situated in the private or at most "semi-public settings" (p. 515). However, others such as Sabine Lang (2012) construct citizens' conversations relating to political matters or the common good as part of the public sphere. Yet another view deems conversations among social circles as a bridge between public and private (Schmitt-Beck and Lup 2013, 516). The rise of digital spaces brings a "civic engagement [that] traverse[s] across public and private planes" through technologies that connect individuals in their private homes to online, public communities (Dennis 2019, Papacharissi 2010, 35).

One of the most productive ways of viewing the public-private divide comes from Nancy Fraser (1990) through the notion of multiple publics, made up of smaller community-specific public spheres, some of which serve as "counterpublics" that challenge dominant points of view

and produce ongoing discussions and conflict (p. 61, 66). Conceiving of these multiple publics as "training ground[s]" for engagement with the larger society, Adriana Hernandez (1997) suggests that smaller publics are critical to strengthening democracy by preserving marginalized points of view (p. 56). Bringing subversive narratives into the broader public sphere challenges hegemonic interpretations, which deliberative democracy scholars suggest can further better understanding of political issues through the introduction of new ideas and differences (Fraser 1990, Hernandez 1997, Mutz 2006, Walsh 2011).

Hernandez's work on Argentina's Madres of the Plaza de Mayo – like the SMF, mothers of the disappeared and murdered – demonstrates how the Madres generated a counterpublic to promote transitional justice following the military dictatorship that ruled from 1976 to 1983 that disappeared and murdered thousands. This was done mainly through weekly public protests that contested Argentina's early post-transition governments, which sought leniency for the former military dictatorship and forgetting the past. Until 1995, Argentina's government and the general public sought to put the period of state terrorism behind them (Bouvard 1994, Gates-Madsen 2016). Hernandez claims that the group's opposition to the government and mainstream of Argentine society strengthened Argentina's democracy by keeping the memory of the dictatorship alive. Today, this perspective has become dominant among the political Left in Argentina, in part thanks to their efforts (Gates-Madsen 2016, 7, Werth 2010, Vaisman 2014, Sutton 2018).

Below, I re-read the post-public collective organizing of the SMF to show that the individual resistance of some former SMF members performed in the in-between space of the public and private spheres—social networks—like the public collective resistance of the

Madres, challenged the forgetting that the Sri Lankan government sought in the aftermath of the reign of terror. While speaking as individuals, the women's combined efforts perhaps constitute collective private resistance.

Southern Mothers' Front: Privately speaking truth to power

In this section, I interweave insights from feminist scholarship on what constitutes the public and private spheres to explore the separate constructions of collective and individual resistances. Nancy Fraser (1990) suggests that "political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (p. 57). Building on this, I argue that the daily conversation of women formerly with the SMF that focused on the memories of their disappeared children is a form of movement resistance or activism, despite involving no public collective action. Public collective action as a movement standard in the interdisciplinary literature on women's participation in movements (Bouvard 1994, Schirmer 1994, Basu 1998, Bejarano 2003, Mahmood 2001) overlooks women's agency in terms of private and individual resistance.

Public collective action brings attention to movement causes from the general public and political elites to influence policymaking that favors a movement's demands (Keck and Sikkink 1998, McAdam 1996, Edwards and McCarthy 2004). Yet individual resistance is an agentic and political act, as well as a necessary component for any kind of collective action (Scott 1985, 304, 336, 339, 343, 1990). Like the perceived public-private divide, the apparent collective-individual resistance divide needs to be fully transgressed or queered since they are not a perfect binary. Collective resistance entails individuals coming together as a group. Yet individuals acting alone may institute, unintentionally, an asynchronous collective action

through their combined individual actions. Moreover, with so many women apparently engaged in these conversations, this may constitute private collective action.

Taking collective and individual resistances as overlapping suggests that some acts of individual resistance in the private sphere can influence the general public and the state. In this section, I highlight actions taken by former SMF members who, following the organization's disbandment in 1994, no longer participated in collective, public actions but engaged in individual resistance in the private sphere. I point to how these private gendered performances kept alive the memories of the disappeared. This was a political act since the government wanted the women to "move on" from the reign of terror.[6] Just as the public-private divide is transgressed through feminist lenses, so too is the case with the collective-individual resistance divide, resulting in an understanding that collective resistance is rooted in participants' individual resistance. When the SLFP founded the SMF, many who joined had been individually resist the state for conducting enforced disappearances, making the rounds at police stations, military encampments and other state facilities in search of their missing loved ones, doing what they could to see to their return.[7]

Through fieldwork, I learned of former members' individual, private resistance from Kumudini Samuel who presented this to me as political. Samuel explained how former members regularly spoke of their disappeared and/or murdered children, despite the government's desire for the women to stop these discussions. No scholarly works on the SMF

[6] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.
[7] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

mention the efforts of these former members after the national SMF disbanded in 1994. I think that the women's individual resistance to the state is missing from the literature because these actions were conducted within the women's social circles, not in public spaces visible to the general public and political elites or even scholars. Movements aim to alter policy, which is most often accomplished through public, collective action (Keck and Sikkink 1998, McAdam 1996, Edwards and McCarthy 2004, Kriesi 2014). However, I argue that if collective and individual resistances are viewed as interconnected, then the individual resistance by former SMF members fed into the public sphere by sustaining a counterpublic that kept alive resistance to the state.

The ongoing counterpublic in Sri Lanka refuses to let the civil war's tragedies disappear from public memory and demands both transitional justice and an end to ongoing human rights abuses (ICES 2019, HRW 2018, R. Fernando 2018). This counterpublic, made up mainly of human rights organizations and progressive journalists in the public sphere, stands in stark contrast to the government and many citizens who seek to memorialize a hyper-masculine, hegemonic nationalism known as Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. This ideology depicts the Sinhalese community, Sinhala language and Buddhist religion as emblematic of Sri Lanka and valorizes the state military, which continues to engage in both direct and indirect violence against minority populations (ICG 2017, SLA n.d., de Mel 2007, Groundviews, Breaking Down the Interim Report: On Proposals for Devolution and the State 2017, Uyangoda 2018). This form of remembering includes the Sri Lankan government's representation of a muscular LTTE to showcase itself as the even stronger vanquisher. This has led to the construction of war

memorials attesting to the strength of Sri Lankan military forces (Hyndman and Amarasingam 2014).

Samuel stresses Samuel stresses the most former women of SMF continued with "political work" as she termed it, but not in the sense of public collective action. Rather, their actions were speaking about their disappeared loved ones in their daily conversations. I was struck by the description of this as political, which Samuel explained was tied to the People's Alliance, the coalition government led by the SLFP and headed by Chandrika Kumaratunga, that sought to "move on" from the reign of terror (1987-1991). Highlighting enforced disappearances and other state human rights violations is not something that governments typically linger on, as it reflects poorly within the international community. Former members of the SMF gave private gendered performances that were set somewhere between the private and public spheres in their re-tellings of the reign of terror about their missing but not forgotten loved ones in ordinary conversations with families, friends and neighbors in the spaces of their daily lives—homes, markets, religious sites, and other spaces that compose daily living. The contribution of former SMF members in speaking truth to power in their social circles was a form of the women's continued political participation and a progressive politics that furthered democracy and human rights. This is a part of the group's legacy.

The government seeks to "move on"

Like her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike—former prime minister of the country—Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga relied on political motherhood to access public office during her 1994 presidential election, although less aggressively than Bandaranaike who relied

on Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.[8] Kumaratunga associated herself with the SMF and portrayed herself as a tragic maternal figure for having lost her husband and father to political violence (Samuel 2006, Samarasinghe 2012). Over her time in office, Kumaratunga adopted her mother's trope of "a Sinhala Buddhist mother," who would protect the (Sinhalese-Buddhist) nation through self-sacrifice (Samarasinghe 2012, 352). In contrast to the hegemonic nationalist cast of Bandaranaike, Kumaratunga read the mood of the populace and—taking a cue from the SMF—emphasized the need to resolve the ongoing civil war through dialogue rather than arms during her presidential campaign (Samuel 2006).

Kumaratunga's government—a coalition government led by the SLFP—moved quickly to launch a series of commissions that investigated enforced disappearances, one of the main aims of the SMF (C. F. Torne 2017). However, after having done this, the government appeared ready to move on from the issue of the disappeared during the reign of terror, which had impacted Sinhalese citizens, who are concentrated in the south of the country. The focus of Kumaratunga's presidency was on ending the political conflict between the government and the LTTE and promoting development, both measures intended to enhance Sri Lanka's international standing (Schaffer 1996). On the few occasions when Kumaratunga referred to the reign of terror, it was to emphasize that this was a closed period where justice had been brought for those affected by the violence. For instance, in a speech of over 7,800 words to Parliament in August 2000, Kumaratunga mentions only this on the reign of terror, insisting:

[8] In 1977, Sri Lanka altered its Westminster style government with the head as the prime minister to a strong presidential system (Malik, et al. 2009).

> Our Government took a number of steps to end the terror that prevailed in the South at that time no sooner we were elected in 1994 itself and we introduced new legislation to achieve that task. We took action to punish the offenders and we are taking such action even now according to law. Because of this, democracy and human rights have been restored and consolidated in all areas of the country except the North and East (SATP, Introducing The Constitutioin Reforms Bill 2000).

Kumaratunga suggests in this speech that human rights and democracy were restored in the Sinhalese-dominated south thanks to her government, signaling her desire to put this behind. It is unclear what Kumaratunga meant by the remark that offenders of the violence were punished. There were no criminal charges sought against perpetrators, which I elaborate on below (C. F. Torne 2017).

Similarly, three years later, Kumaratunga mentioned the reign of terror, again suggesting this period was over and justice restore:

> I cannot forget the massive mandate I received from the people repeatedly at 11 different rounds of elections over a period of 9 years, was mainly given to us loudly and clearly by the vast majority of our peoples from East to West and North to South of the Island to bring back the rule of law and to halt the gross violations of fundamental rights of persons, to bring to a halt the era of murder of Black July of 1983 which drove the Tamil people to war and also the mass murder of 50,000 Sinhala youth in the South mainly by the State and partly by an armed insurgent group of the South. Permit me to say that we were hugely successful in wiping out this political culture of violence in 1994

(SATP, Special Address to the Nation on November 7, 2003, by President Chandrika Kumaratunga 2003).

In this speech of 3,191 words, Kumaratunga perfunctorily recalls the violence to which all Sri Lankans were subject in the early 1990s – under the SLFP's rival, the UNP – and again notes her government's success in ending this violence.

From the start of her presidency, Kumaratunga's People's Alliance focused on achieving a political solution to the conflict with the LTTE since Kumaratunga was elected largely on this promise. During the 1994 presidential campaign, much of the Sinhalese population sought an end to the then ongoing decade-long conflict; more so among the Tamil community, who had borne the brunt of the war. Likewise, because Kumaratunga promoted devolution for the Tamil community and avoided Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, she gained popularity among the Tamil and Muslim communities (Schaffer 1996, Guneratne 2013). Devolution was to increase decision-making to the provinces, which are strongly communal based, with Tamils concentrated in the north and the Sinhalese in the south. The objective was to provide greater say to Tamils over their own affairs (Kailasapathy 2012, Oberst, et al. 2014). The international community was eager to see progress in peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. During her first full year in office Kumaratunga received considerable praise from the international community for her peace efforts (Schaffer 1996).

As indicated in official international and domestic speeches and letters, ending the civil war and promoting development was the focus of Kumaratunga's presidency throughout her

time in office, which ended in 2005.[9] Of the 30 texts reviewed, only two mentioned the reign of terror, both in passing. In pursuing development to promote the country's image abroad,

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[9] A selection of digitally available Kumaratunga's speeches and letters, as well as other statements, bills and speeches released by the Government of Sri Lanka under Kumaratunga's People's Alliance were analyzed by theme. These selections come from the South Asia Terrorism Portal and Iowa State University's Archives of Women's Political Communication. Six texts aimed at domestic audiences emphasized peace (SATP, Message on The First Annual War Heroes Day by the President of Sri Lanka June 7, 2000 2000, SATP, President Kumaratunga's Speech at the National Advisory Council for Peace and Reconciliation 2004, SATP, Letter by President Kumaratunga to the Leader of Opposition, Ranil Wickremesinghe, Explaining Objectives of the NACPR 2004, SATP, President Kumaratunga's Speech on the 21st Anniversary of 'Black July' 2004, SATP, De-escalation Plan Proposed by Security Forces Commander, Jaffna Peninsula, Maj. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, to Enable Re-settlement of Civilians in High Security Zones, December 20, 2002 2002, SATP, President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Address to the Nation, 53rd Independence Day, February 4, 2001 2001); three on devolution (SATP, Sri Lanka Freedom Party's Statement on the LTTE's Proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority for the North and East of Sri Lanka 2003, SATP, Statement by the Sri Lankan Government in Response to LTTE's Proposals on Interim Self-Governing Authority in the Northeast 2003, SATP, Kumaratunga's Devolution Proposal 1995); and one the 2004 tsunami (SATP, President's Address to the Nation on the 57th Anniversary of Independence 2005). Eight texts directed at international audiences focused on peace (SATP, President's Speech at the 60th Session of United Nations General Assembly 2005, SATP, Sri Lankan President's Speech at the UN General Assembly's 59th Session 2004, SATP, Sri Lankan President's Speech at Asia Society, New York 2004, SATP, Declaration in Support of the Peace Process in Sri Lanka, Oslo, November 25, 2002 2002, SATP, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe's Speech at the Opening Session of Peace Support Meeting, Oslo, 25th November 2002 2002, SATP, Statement by the Leader of the Government Delegation and Cabinet Minister G L Peiris at the Inaugural Conference of Sri Lanka Peace Talks, Sattahip, Thailand, September 16, 2002 2002, SATP, Speech by the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington D C, July 23, 2002 2002, SATP, Address by the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Tyronne Fernando at the Asia Society, New York, June 2002 2002); four on development (SATP, President's Speech at the 13th SAARC Summit in Dhaka 2005, AWPC, Address at the United Nations 50th Anniversary- Oct. 22, 1995 1995, SATP, President of Sri Lanka Chandrika Kumaratunga's statement at the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad, Pakistan, on January 4, 2004 2004, AWPC, Inauguration of the 2005 Sri Lanka Development Forum - May 16, 2005 2005); four on both peace and development (SATP, President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Speech at 2005 Sri Lanka Development Forum 2005, SATP, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's Speech at the Tokyo Donor Conference, June 9, 2003 2003, SATP, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's Concluding Remarks at the Tokyo Donor Conference on June 10, 2003 2003, AWPC, Address to the UN World Summit For Social Development - March 12, 1995 1995); and one on international terrorism (SATP, Speech by the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, Lakshman Kadirgamar, during the United Nations General Assembly Debate on International Terrorism, October 2,

despite the SLFP's history of socialist economic policies, the People's Alliance under Kumaratunga privatized government-owned facilities and promoted foreign investment (Schaffer 1996). In contrast to its work on development, the government's effort for peace was severely complicated in 2001, when Kumaratunga's government joined forces with, in her words, "the devil" out of a lack of political options, bringing the JVP into the People's Alliance. The JVP is a nationalist party, decidedly against devolution and one of the instigators of the reign of terror (Reuters 2001). This move came atop the early failure of peace talks in 1995 that pushed the People's Alliance to pursue both concessions to the Tamil community as well as military efforts against the LTTE (Malik, et al. 2009).

Upon winning the election in 1994, Kumaratunga was eager to begin government investigations into the violence related to the reign of terror, ostensibly to provide some justice for survivors of enforced disappearance and families of the disappeared and murdered, which was a campaign promise and a demand of the SMF (de Mel 2001). On 30 November 1994, commissions into the reign of terror in the south were launched, as well as commissions into other enforced disappearances in the north and east, mere weeks after Kumaratunga entered office on 12 November (C. F. Torne 2017). This was likely because the UNP, the long-time rival of the SLFP, was the head of the government during the reign of terror, responsible for a great deal of the violence associated with this period.[10] Although the reign of terror began with the

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2001 2001). One text intended for both domestic and international consumption focused on peace (SATP, Memorandum of Understanding 2002).

[10] In terms of the disappearances in the north and east, much was attributed to the LTTE, although government forces were also blamed (C. F. Torne 2017).

anti-government insurrection by the JVP – whose members attacked not only police officers and politicians but also civilians – the UNP government led unrestrained violence that ignored the rule of law as police and other state forces attacked citizens who had no association with the JVP along with members of the JVP. Rather than working through the criminal justice system to hold members of the JVP accountable for violence committed, immediate retribution that included enforced disappearance and killing abounded (de Alwis 2001, de Mel 2001).

Official investigations into the reign of terror were politically expedient for Kumaratunga and the SLFP since it reinforced a negative image of the UNP for crimes committed against Sinhalese citizens, the voter bloc of both parties (ICG 2007). Nevertheless, it was not apparently useful for Kumaratunga and her government to linger on the reign of terror after the commissions wrapped up in 1998 (C. F. Torne 2017). This is evident given that the commissions' findings had only a few publicly available copies made available, making the report largely inaccessible. Very few people in Sri Lanka ever knew of the commissions as there was little promotion of the investigations and their findings. This was the case even among those who had testified at these commissions, which had included some former SMF members, who never learned what became of their testimonies (C. F. Torne 2017).[11] Considering that this was a campaign promise of the SLFP, it is surprising that they would not have extensively promoted it.

There is a possible explanation for this. The commission investigators recommended providing economic compensation to those who had survived being disappeared and for families of the disappeared, as well as criminal accountability for perpetrators. The government

[11] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

made no efforts to hold individuals accountable for carrying out these crimes as this would have required filing charges against state security forces (C. F. Torne 2017). Both the military and police are given considerable respect by most of the Sinhalese majority as these forces are viewed as protectors of the state, part of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism (de Mel 2007). It would have been politically detrimental for the SLFP to be involved in such an effort as the SLFP relied on the majority Sinhalese vote (ICG 2007). When investigators gave Kumaratunga a list of at least 1,000 names of perpetrators responsible for committing violence, she was warned by her uncle, then working in the Ministry of Defense, that if she pursued charges against these individuals, she would lose the support of the Sri Lankan army.[12] By this point in Kumaratunga's presidency, the People's Alliance was using the military to fight against the LTTE (while simultaneously pursuing devolution for greater autonomy for the Tamil community through Parliament), meaning that the army was a force that the Kumaratunga needed on her side if she hoped to see a military defeat of the LTTE (Malik, et al. 2009).

Through the commission into enforced disappearances in the reign of terror, Kumaratunga's government apparently sought to portray the UNP in negatively. Following this investigation, the government appeared ready to move on. This was in part due to the complications of accountability of state security forces when the government needed its armed forces to continue its war against the LTTE. Moreover, prosecuting members of the military and police forces would have cost the SLFP votes. Kumaratunga was in many ways indebted to the SMF for her election in 1994.[13] The group's main demands were commissions to exonerate

[12] Brito Fernando, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.
[13] Malathi de Alwis, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

their disappeared loved ones of guilt, find them and return them if alive, and provide economic compensation for those who had suffered during the reign of terror (de Mel 2001). In conducting the commissions and dispensing reparations, Kumaratunga's government appears to have felt this campaign promise was fulfilled. To linger on it would distract from resolving another campaign promise, sought by the majority of Sri Lankans in the mid-1990s, for an end to the civil war, which at the time of the 1994 election was in its eleventh year (Schaffer 1996).

The peace talks that began in January 1995 between the People's Alliance government and LTTE broke down after four months. The LTTE sought greater concessions from the government than the government was willing to give. In April, the LTTE carried out several attacks against both state and civilian targets to the embarrassment of the People's Alliance. Nevertheless, the Sri Lankan government continued its efforts for more autonomy to the Tamil community. However, LTTE attacks emboldened Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, which included some of the country's most senior Buddhist monks, an influential political constituency, against any form of devolution (Schaffer 1996). Devolution was never popular among some Sinhalese, who feared it would lead to a Tamil takeover. This perspective views Sri Lanka as a lone respite for Buddhism, surrounded by a hostile, Hindu-dominated India. Although the Sinhalese community constitutes over 70 percent of the population, many Sinhalese fear being overtaken by minority communities (Groundviews, Breaking Down the Interim Report: On Proposals for Devolution and the State 2017, Uyangoda 2018). While the People's Alliance argued that devolution was a worthwhile compromise to end the war, some in the Sinhalese community viewed devolution as a concession to the LTTE, a sentiment that was in full force even as the government revealed its devolution plan in summer 1995 (Schaffer 1996).

From the start of her presidency, Kumaratunga was unable to work with the UNP in Parliament, which led to problems in implementing devolution since the People's Alliance did not hold enough votes to pass the plan without UNP support (Schaffer 1996). By 2001, Kumaratunga's popularity was waning, in part because of another aspect of her electoral success in 1994: the campaign promise to lessen the powers of the presidency, which had been greatly expanded under UNP rule in 1977. The People's Alliance refused to make any reductions to executive powers until devolution passed. With no other option, the People's Alliance brought the JVP into the coalition during the 2001 Parliamentary elections (Schaffer 1996, Reuters 2001, Hill 2013). This likely gave Kumaratunga even less reason to emphasize the reign of terror due to the JVP's instigation of the violence.

Applying the framework: private collective resistance

The Sri Lankan human rights community has generally been fearful of discussing the reign of terror, as well as the issue of enforced disappearances.[14] Indeed, the point of such crimes is often not to punish the individuals who endure enforced disappearance, but rather terrorize into silence entire populations. Out of fear, people disassociate themselves from the disappeared and families of the disappeared, not wanting to be caught up in any violence themselves (de Mel 2001). Sri Lanka's human rights movement is strong. Yet it is small in numbers and there has remained a good deal of understandable fear in speaking about this period due to the terror it inflicted on the population (Orjuela 2008).[15]

[14] Brito Fernando, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.
[15] Brito Fernando, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

While the evidence for counterpublics is typically found in media sources such as newspapers, magazines, and increasingly, internet blogs and Twitter accounts (Friedman 2017), I argue that conversations also contribute to a counterpublic. In this case, that former members of the SMF continued to speak of their disappeared loved ones is all the more critical since many were fearful to do just this.[16] Nancy Fraser (1990) characterizes counterpublics as counternarratives, meaning that there is no more important contribution to a counterpublic than a conversation, a literal narrative that supported remembering the reign of terror as opposed to forgetting it. While Kumaratunga claimed that the reign of terror human rights abuses were "resolved," many former women of the SMF likely did not find this to be the case since they did not want to stop recalling this traumatic past (C. Kumaratunga 2000). These women chose to continue discussing their lost loved ones, which, as Samuel pointed out, was exactly what Kumaratunga's government sought to move on from, with its focus on ending the civil war.[17]

I highlight the continued contributions of former members of the SMF through individual resistance. As Carole Pateman (1970) emphasized, by regularly engaging in political work, the values of democracy are appreciated, meaning that any involvement in political participation will have lasting effects on its participants. Although many of the former members of the SMF may not have continued with public collective action, this did not mean that they failed to remain politically active and to contribute to human rights causes and support for

[16] Brito Fernando, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.
[17] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka. Likewise, in retrospect, Kumaratunga's decision to pursue both military attacks on the LTTE while working to promote devolution for the Tamil community seems contradictory. It was likely that she felt both were necessary, perhaps as a way to placate Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists while trying to make good on her campaign promise to end the conflict.

democracy. Their gendered performances as conversations with their loved ones, friends and neighbors may not have been overtly in the public sphere, but they did reach the counterpublic that ran against the wishes of the state that sought to move on from the reign of terror.

Samuel constructs conversations of former SMF women remembering their disappeared loved ones as political work.[18] This opens possibilities for understanding the women's continued contributions after public collective organizing had ended. Viewing ordinary conversation as a form of activism crosses not only the political science literature on political participation and social movements but also the literatures of participatory and deliberative democracy. Participatory democracy promotes participation among ordinary people in having input in politics, which is thought to develop and deepen their appreciation for democracy (C. Pateman 1970, della Porta and Rucht 2013). Deliberative democracy stresses the notion that deliberation, or debate, matters to a healthy democracy, suggesting that in hearing different sides of a debate, people scrutinize their assumptions and analyses to become better informed (Fishkin 1997, Mutz 2006, Gastil 2008). In this paper, I have suggested what constructing conversation on political issues within our social circles might mean for social movement resistance. By taking everyday conversing as participation, I suggest that former members of the SMF who spoke of the memories of their disappeared children, even if "only" among their social circles, were activists since they practiced resistance and helped to keep a counterpublic alive.

[18] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The literature on deliberative democracy, as its name suggests, prioritizes deliberations, specifically those that highlight multiple perspectives, with the objective to help citizens clarify political issues. Since the systems turn, this body of literature has generally assumed that deliberations are best held in state institutions or other public forums such as the media, and in a structured manner (Fishkin 1997, Searing, et al. 2007, 589, Gastil 2008). Casual, everyday conversation may not easily generate the kind of political discussion intended in deliberative democracy because ordinary conversation often takes place among those who share the same beliefs (Searing, et al. 2007, 590). Deliberative democracy is focused on bringing out differing views to challenge preconceived opinions and generate critical thinking. This is thought to occur mainly in the public sphere where citizens can hear from those outside their social circles (Mutz 2006). However, critical voices in the deliberative democracy literature suggest that "deliberative conversation" and even non-deliberative conversation of the mundane are integral to democracy's vitality (Mansbridge 1999, Mutz 2006, Gastil 2008, Klofstad 2011). I take this a step further by viewing conversing on political issues as a form of movement resistance. Although less confrontational than traditional social movements, the quality of democracy is enhanced through contesting the government's claims (Moore 2017, 178). As the feminist scholar Brooke Ackerly (2000) argues, deliberative democracy – even under imperfect conditions in which actors hold different levels of power – can strengthen democracy when actors are committed to learning from others and engaging in self-criticism as methods to work towards greater political, social and economic equality and inclusion (p. 6-7, 13-14, 55-56). It is the deliberation itself that promotes this.

After 1994, the remembering promulgated through the social circles of women formerly with the SMF was a resistance not of public protest but rather a subversive political discourse against the hegemonic narrative of the state, part of a counterpublic that challenged the state's desire to move on from the reign of terror that had gripped southern Sri Lanka from 1987 until 1991. This resistance allowed the women to continue to practice social movement activism. It is unclear what level of impact these everyday conversations had on the counterpublic that remembers the civil war and the period of the reign of terror in particular. My purpose is not to measure that impact but rather to call attention to the women's performances as political participation. At the very least, the women provided a form of individual resistance that bolstered a counternarrative that challenged the mainstream view that all was well (in the south) and that the reign of terror could be forgotten.[19] That Sri Lanka still has work to do to in coming to terms with not only the reign of terror but the entirety of the civil war means that the political work of former SMF members was no small feat (Groundviews, Breaking Down the Interim Report: On Proposals for Devolution and the State 2017, Uyangoda 2018). Their legacy should not be forgotten, both in terms of their collective action during the reign of terror and later private efforts to preserve the collective memory of this period.

A politics of memory that challenges the state's version of events is intent on impacting political outcomes. The politics of memory literature suggests that memory and identity are integral to self-understandings and to the larger collective of the community—whether that community is a movement, an ethnic group or a country—and are inherent to transitional

[19] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

justice, which seeks to help countries collectively heal from atrocities (Antze and Lambeck 1996, Barahona de Brito, González-Enríquez and Aguilar 2001, Bakiner 2015). I trouble an interpretation of the women's conversations as solely private since women formerly with the SMF promoted a politics of memory through conversations with family, friends and neighbors. Their actions cannot be viewed as either strictly individual or collective resistance but rather an "in-betweenness." The women's individual gendered performances—speaking about their disappeared—fed collective resistance against the state's narrative that wanted to "move on" from the enforced disappearances of the south. It was a counterpublic that called into question the state's politics of memory.

Despite contributions made to movement causes through individual resistance, social movements continue to prioritize public protests. Although scholars, activists and practitioners are working to make public spaces as inclusive as possible, there may always be those who can never physically leave their homes and others, like former SMF members, who may have too many responsibilities to engage in regular collective actions (Hamraie 2018, Kingston 2014, Priestley, et al. 2016). Furthermore, the political participation literature and resource mobilization literature indicates that resources such as leisure time, level of education and income affect the ability of people to participate politically, including in movements, with higher levels of each of the three correlated with increased political involvement and ease of organizing in movements (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Kitschelt and Rehm 2014, McCarthy and Zald 1977, Edwards and McCarthy 2004). How can we ensure that such individuals have access to political engagement? By constructing avenues outside public protest as movement resistance or activism, resistance becomes more accessible. For example,

denigrating online activism as “slacktivism,” or denying the importance of ordinary conversations ignores the impacts that these individual forms of resistance make in terms of shaping political attitudes—both of those performing this work and of those whom they come into contact with their efforts (Dennis 2019, 3, 15-16). Such influence is ultimately collective since it reaches beyond the individual.

Finally, expecting women undergoing the trauma of losing a loved one and taking on new responsibilities due to the loss of a loved one (such as women of the SMF) to continue with public collective action is unproductive in terms of broadening political participation and unfair in terms of the larger political project of feminism. Feminist scholarship notes that women face demands to be self-sacrificing for the benefit of others, pressured to “do it all” (Firestone 1970, Hochschild 1989, Moreno 2017). One aspect of feminism has been to dismantle the unfair expectations placed on women. Expanding the definition of activism can lead us to reassess the legacy of SMF. By including individual resistances in the private sphere—such as personal conversations if they entail political concern—is a shift that encourages scholars of social movements to capture and analyze a greater range of political engagement. I am not arguing against making the public sphere accessible for marginalized groups. Rather I seek to bring the politics of individual resistance in the private sphere under the umbrella of activism to ensure that social movements are as inclusive as possible.

Conclusion: Broadening activism and resistance

Even if acts of individual resistance or collective private actions are not as efficient as gaining attention from the government and the general public as compared with public

protests, these avenues offer a wider path of political engagement for many types of people. Through a feminist re-reading of the SMF's collective and private resistance, this paper argued for the importance of ordinary conversations among family, friends and neighbors when such conversations contribute to critical counternarratives that challenge hegemonic discourses. Through this re-reading, we can reassess the legacy of SMF and appreciate that while the SMF as an organization disbanded, many of its former members remained mobilized through individual resistance that formed a collective resistance that promoted a politics of memory of the war period and prevented the total normalization of the reign of terror. By making the case for former SMF members, social movement work becomes more inclusive. To conclude, I suggest that democracy and political participation in Sri Lanka are both better off thanks to the work of the SMF and its former members, who worked preserve the memory of the disappeared through repeated stories of disappeared loved ones.[20] This effort continues with the ongoing work of a counterpublic against official discourses of the Sri Lankan Civil War, including work being done both within Sri Lanka as well as the diaspora (MOMAC n.d., PEARL n.d., TG 2020).

[20] Kumudini Samuel, interview with the author, October 2017. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

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