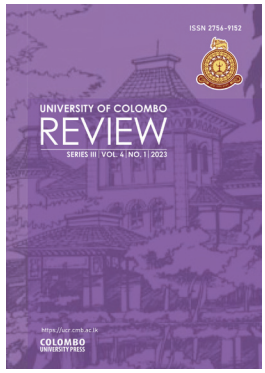

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Carrying the cross for justice: Digital traces of victimhood in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Victimhood claims in the digital space are often affectively and morally negotiated based on the extent of sharedness of those sentiments and values. However, media-centric and populist political interpretations based on 'mobilization' often curtail the exploration of 'sharedness' and 'belonging' in digital discourses of victimhood. Therefore, this article explores the nature of digital victimhood discourses, their constitution, and how those victimhoods are negotiated in digital collectives. The article combines affective victimhood with chronotope to analyze digital discourses on 'public acts' carried out by members of the public seeking justice for the Easter attack victims of 2019. Accordingly, the article focuses on Facebook posts and comment sequences on **"**Jehan Appuhamy carrying the cross**"** to mark the third anniversary of the attacks in April 2022. Data is gathered from four Facebook posts containing a collection of videos and images combined with a selected 3142 post-comment sequences. The article finds that affective and moral understandings of victimhood are negotiated in interaction with right-wing populist undertones and resistance discourses of the people's protest. The narratives of justice, threat, empathy, and solidarity constitute a multifaceted expression of discontent, representing both a struggle against those in power and a quest to connect with like-minded individuals, irrespective of the specific cause for such sentiments. Additionally, it involves rallying support from friends, sharing feelings of discontent, and motivating them to take action. Thus, digital belonging is fractally nested in specific timespace configurations.

KEYWORDS:
Victimhood; Affect; Chronotope; Digital space

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Introduction

The affective and moral-political frames used to designate victimhood in the mainstream media can often suppress alternative expressions of victimhood and undermine the pursuit of justice and redress. It has long been observed in Sri Lanka and elsewhere that state-sanctioned victimhood dominates the political rhetoric and media representations (Brown & Mondon, 2021; Armaly & Enders, 2021; Herath & Rambukwalla, 2015). The era of Trump politics in the US, Modi in India, and the Rajapaksa regime in Sri Lanka illustrate a dominance of state-sanctioned victimhood frames in the media. Quite often, victimhood is fronted and fringed in the media in line with the populist political rhetoric fostering an in-group identity while distancing the other. For instance, the connection between the repertoires of authoritarian populism and media frames becomes apparent in the representation of 'victims' and 'saviors' both during and after the civil war fought in the north and east of the country which ended in 2009.[1] Particularly, the construction of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa as "a man of the people, for the people" through the rhetoric of the nation, terrorism and authenticity conform to the underlying victim and savior frames (Gaul, 2021, p. 101). However, the expanding social media use in the country provided a space for alternative victimhoods to emerge and vie for visibility and voice. It provided a space for once-fringed individuals and communities to gain attention, mobilize support, and negotiate their victimhood claims, as evident in April 2022 when Jehan Appuhamy, a popular television personality in the country, commenced his journey of carrying the cross from Katuwapitiya calling for justice to those affected by the Easter Sunday bombings of April 2019.

Background

The Easter Sunday attacks occurred in the early hours of April 21, 2019, targeting three churches and three hotels in different parts in Sri Lanka. These were reportedly linked to National Thowheed Jamaath (NTJ), a previously little-known domestic Islamist extremist organization, led by Zahran Hashim (Gunasingham, 2019; Imthiyaz, 2020; Jayasuriya, 2020). The coordinated suicide attacks resulted in the tragic loss of over 250 lives while injuring many more ("2019 Easter Sunday attacks," 2022). The bombings targeted the St. Anthony's Shrine in Colombo, St. Sebastian's Church in Negombo, and Zion Church in Batticaloa—and three luxury hotels, Shangri La, Kingsbury and Cinnamon Grand in Colombo. The bombings had

[1] The war in Sri Lanka began in 1983 as anti-Tamil riots escalated in the country. Soon it turned into a conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), seeking an independent Tamil state. Lasting for 26 years, it ended in 2009 when the Sri Lankan military defeated the LTTE, leading to the death of their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, and the declaration of victory by the government. The war resulted in significant casualties and displacement, with allegations of human rights abuses on both sides.

far-reaching consequences with the government facing criticism for the vulnerabilities in the security apparatus, ineffectiveness in sharing intelligence information, and failure to act on prior intelligence warnings about the impending attacks (Senaratne, 2019).

In the aftermath of the attacks, the Sri Lankan government took action to apprehend the perpetrators and dismantle extremist networks with the security forces engaged in arresting accomplices and seizing weapons and explosives (Kariyakarawana & Sanjeewa, 2019). Furthermore, a Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) was established to inquire into the attacks and recommend action (Tiranagama, 2021). However, the Commission report which was presented in 2021, was criticized as having lapses and thus not providing justice anticipated by the victims (Tiranagama, 2021).

To mark the third anniversary of the Easter Sunday attacks, the actor Jehan Appuhamy engaged in a march while carrying a cross across the streets of Colombo, seeking justice for the victims of the attacks. His three-day march commenced on April 19, 2022, from St. Sebastian Church, Katuwapitiya, one of the attack sites where over a hundred people were killed, and arrived at Galle Face a few days later, on April 22, 2022. Along with the third anniversary of the Easter Sunday attacks, a series of mass protests (widely referred to as "aragalaya") were taking place at the Galle Face in Colombo and across the country.

The people's protest (aragalaya) emerged during the presidency of Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, escalating economic hardships and allegations of economic mismanagement (Fedricks et al., 2022; Devapriya, 2022; Imtiyaz, 2022). Furthermore, a growing wave of worker-led protests erupted throughout 2021 and early 2022, fueled by government policies and escalating economic hardships (Gunawardena & Kadirgamar, 2022). This economic crisis soon evolved into a profound political crisis as citizens from all parts of the island took to the streets, calling for the resignation of the president and his government. Key moments in the "aragalaya" included the protests near the President's residence on March 31, 2022, and the establishment of "Gotagogama" at Galle Face, Colombo in mid-April 2022, accompanied by the viral hashtag #GoHomeGota on social media (Fedricks et al., 2022; Devapriya, 2022; Silva & Gamage, 2023). The protests in Galle Face and across the country lasted for over three months and culminated in the resignation of the president and the appointment of a new government. Against this backdrop, the multi-religious commemoration of the Easter Sunday attacks at the protest site in Galle Face on April 21, 2022 (Newsfirst Sri Lanka, 2022) and the act of carrying the cross to Gotagogama at Galle Face on April 22, 2022, serves as a poignant link connecting the grievances stemming from the Easter Sunday attacks with the ongoing protests (aragalaya) on the ground.

Thus, the protests, sparked by the economic crisis, corruption and governance issues, soon spilled over to incorporate the frustration over the perceived lack of progress in achieving justice for the victims of the Easter Sunday bombings. The protesters, including victims' families, survivors, and concerned citizens, demanded answers, accountability, and a swift resolution to the issues surrounding the attacks. The ongoing action on the ground was reflected on social media platforms, particularly on Facebook, where the users calling for justice, accountability, and change maximized the potential of the digital space to draw attention to the march. The incident vividly exemplified how victimhood claims in the digital space are often affectively and morally negotiated based on the extent of the sharedness of those sentiments and values.

Understanding victimhood in the digital space

Victimhood claims in the digital space have received little attention among scholarly circles in Sri Lanka and South Asia. Most studies on victimhood approach the concept through populist political discourses or media-centric analysis (Chakravartty & Roy, 2015, 2017; Gaul, 2021; Gamage, 2021). Both approaches highlight the constructed and mobilized nature of victimhood narratives. Therefore, this article aims to take a relational approach to study unfolding victimhood in the digital space in Sri Lanka using affective victimhood and Bakhtin's chronotope (Blommaert, 2016). More specifically, the article discusses the negotiations of rival victimhood using the work done in relation to the digital space and affective and moral political dimensions of victimhood.

Digital societies are inherently hybrid and facilitate the emergence of novel public spaces - where local, national and transnational spaces containing multiple and heterogenous voices gain expression and visibility and can potentially challenge the established power balances within society (Blommaert & De Fina, 2017; Roberts & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021). These spaces facilitate as well as constrain complex networks of social interactions facilitated by digital technology. While digital technologies facilitate social change and promote increased connectivity, they can also create new forms of inequality and exclusion (Castells, 2004, p. 4). Hence, there is a need for a critical and nuanced approach to studying victimhood negotiations in digital societies, which acknowledges both the benefits and challenges of digital technologies in contemporary society.

Digital spaces have given rise to rival victimhood, which refers not only to an experience of feeling victimized or oppressed but also to a context where anyone can come forward with their stories of victimization (Chouliaraki, 2021; Munt, 2016). Victimhood discourses stem from an understanding of vulnerability as not only associated with precarity but as a universal condition applicable to all human beings. It also accompanies a shift in contemporary victimhood studies from

the traditional harm-based and blame-based discourses to contextual approaches to studying victimhood (Álvarez Berastegi & Hearty, 2019). Therefore, we now see victimhood not as a fixed category but as an increasingly complex and fluid one (Chouliaraki, 2021; Tlostanova, 2019; Zembylas, 2021). According to Zembylas, the "affective logic of victimhood [is] a terrain of struggle over competing claims to suffering, trauma and injury"; where "affective claims" to those injuries become "[tactically mobilized] for moral and political gain" (2021).[2]

This phenomenon is present across various contexts, including Trump politics, white supremacy, male victimhood, micro-aggression and moral cultures (Kelly, 2021; Inwood, 2019; Banet-Weiser, 2021; Campbell & Manning, 2018). Essentially, victimhood discourses are constituted against the vertical elites and the horizontal others, often grounded in a collective and "contextual" harm-based identity. According to Brubaker, the 'people debate' is often characterized by a sense of grievance and a belief that the interests of the people are being ignored or undermined by political elites (2017, 2020; See also Bonikowski, 2019). This vertical narrative of victimhood is often grounded in a collective identity based on shared experiences of economic, cultural, or political marginalization. However, the victimhood narrative is also directed against horizontal others, such as immigrants, minorities, or other marginalized groups, who are seen as threats to the interests and values of the people (Brubaker, 2017, 2020; Ganesh, 2020). This creates a sense of us versus them, where the interests of *the people* are pitted against those of others.

However, an emerging alternative reading is that the mass collectives of *the people* are not so much constructed but become negotiated as specific time and space configurations (Blommaert & De Fina, 2017; Varis & Blommaert, 2015). According to this perspective, victimhood is not a fixed or essential characteristic of an individual or group but an unfolding action shaped by the specific time and space associations in which it occurs. This means that victimhood, as a social phenomenon, is not a pre-constructed entity; but emerges and evolves over time as a product of ongoing social interaction. De Fina & Wegner further argue that social identities are co-constructed in discourse and emphasize that they shape identity and belonging based on a particular time and space while also "adhering or deviating from particular moral systems" (2021, p. 7).[3]

Bakhtin's chronotope is synonymous with the interweaving of different spatiotemporal dimensions, highlighting socio-cultural and political contexts, juxtapositions of the past, present and future within the discourse and the emergence of identity and belonging (Blommaert, 2016; Blommaert & De Fina, 2017). According to Blommaert, digital chronotopes were fundamentally altered with the introduction

[2] Zembylas, 2021, Abstract

[3] As evident in post-truth and Trump's discourse on migration using "banal" language to present a "coherent worldview" (De Fina & Wegner, 2021, p. 5)

of web technologies[4] spanning local and translocal contexts and enabling the use of multimodal and cross-platform content (2018). He further stated that the digital chronotopes "contain orders of indexicals that act as "systemic patterns of authority, …. of control and [moral and affective] evaluation" within the digital contexts (2007, p. 117).

Victimhood is both an "affective politics of vulnerability" as much as a chronotopic negotiation of affects (Chouliaraki, 2021, p. 16). The digital space creates a platform for affective victimhood discourses, with different groups claiming victimhood and competing for recognition and legitimacy. Affects are not simply internal states or emotions but rather emerge from a relational "encounter between bodies, affects, and worlds" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 4). They are dynamic, non-representational, and always emergent. This article discusses affective victimhood using Spinozist and Deleuze-Guattari's articulation of affect as 'potentia' to affect and be affected (2010; Surin, 2019). The potentialities of affect go beyond affective states and intensities to focus on the potentialities for change. In this context, the victimhood affects are characterized as pre-personal, non-bodily and shared feelings and affects relating to victimhood. For Zentz, the affective stances indicate the affective evaluations towards a particular person or issue (2021a, 2021b). Moreover, the affective dimension is useful to identify how individual displays of affective orientations relating to the Easter attacks of 2019 and the subsequent quests for justice transform into collective affects in the digital domain.

Victimhood not only involve shared affects but also contain a moral-political dimension. This dimension relates to how victimhood is framed and understood within broader moral and political frameworks. Campbell and Manning propose a framework of moral-political frames to understand how individuals and groups use moral language to make sense of and respond to political issues, including victimhood (2018). They argue that moral-political frames are used to construct narratives about the nature of social problems and their causes, and to identify solutions. These frames are based on moral principles and values and can be used to legitimize or delegitimize political actions and policies. Zentz expands on the idea of moral-political stances to include three interrelated elements: moral principles, political goals, and emotional experiences (2021a). She argues that moral-political stances define and defend moral and political values and create a sense of collective identity and solidarity (2021b). These stances can justify political actions and policies and mobilize political movements around social justice issues, including victimhood. Thus, the moral-political dimension of victimhood reflects how it is framed and understood within broader moral and political frameworks prevailing within a particular society.

[4] Web technologies in the forms of previous 2.0 technologies to the present day 4.0 web technologies

Blommaert also identifies that chronotopes are useful in examining the ways in which moral normativity is constructed and contested in the digital context (2015, 2018). He argues that moral norms relating to contemporary societies are no longer established by centralized authorities such as churches or governments but rather emerge from the interactions and exchanges between individuals in diverse digital spaces. Moral indicators within the victimhood paradigm deal with the perceptions of vulnerability, power, social justice and how successive political regimes respond to such fundamental issues. The moral-political stances contain individual dispositions that signal moral judgments and preferences. They emerge "through positionings of the self in relation to culturally shared values" (Zentz, 2021a, p. 27) and virtue signaling (Campbell & Manning, 2018; See also Zentz, 2021a). The moral-political talk has also attracted considerable attention in the media and social media fields and the data used for this purpose often include emotions and moral-political valuations expressed through the text, emojis, memes, hashtags and textual devices such as caps locks and highlights.

Accordingly, the article focuses on exploring the affective and moral dimensions of victimhood in the digital space. More specifically, it examines how victimhood is negotiated in the digital space. This article, therefore, focuses on the following questions: (1) what are the discourses of victimhood, (2) how is victimhood depicted in the post-comment sequences, and (3) how is victimhood negotiated in digital collectives.

Methodology

This article examines victimhood discourses in relation to Jehan Appuhamy's act of carrying the cross to mark the third anniversary of the Easter Sunday Attacks in April 2022. The research involves a qualitative exploration of digital discourses, specifically focusing on public posts on Facebook. These public posts, accessible to a broad and diverse audience, provide valuable insights into various perspectives on victimhood relating to Jehan Appuhamy carrying the cross for justice. To gather data, searches were conducted using the search option on Facebook with English and Sinhala keywords, hashtags, and specific timeframes related to the incident, such as "Jehan carrying the cross," "#Easterattacks,", "Carrying the cross April 2022", ''ජෙහාන් අප්පුහාමි'' ('Jehan Appuhamy'), and ''පාස්කු ඉරිදා ප්‍රහාරය'' ('Easter Sunday Attacks'). Intensity sampling was employed to select a small yet diverse collection of posts that depicted victimhood discourses comprehensively. The chosen posts covered different aspects of the event, included diverse voices in the comment sections and contained substantial engagement in the form of views, comments, likes, and shares. From the data extracted between April 21, 2022, and early May 2022, four posts (two videos and two images) with extensive comment sequences were selected

for further analysis. Altogether, 4,830 comments were extracted initially, but after preliminary searches, 1,688 comments were excluded due to technical/format issues, incomprehensible content, or the absence of identifiable victimhood discourse. The final dataset comprised 3,142 post-comment sequences, incorporating various forms of content, such as text, images, memes, hashtags, emojis, and video links. For the purpose of analysis, the data was anonymized and organized chronologically.

The data was analyzed using close reading techniques (Georgakopoulou, 2015; Kitchin & Lauriault, 2015; Lindgren, 2014) to ensure a comprehensive and meaningful understanding. This approach allowed the researcher to focus on a smaller yet highly relevant data set, enabling the exploration of emerging chronotopic patterns. The coding process involved three phases: the first phase involved open coding, which helped identify initial themes within the data. Subsequently, the second and third stages delved into victimhood and examined the associated affective and moral-political expressions. The final stage of the analysis involved identifying chronotopic patterns of victimhood and belonging within the dataset. An open and flexible approach was adopted throughout the coding phase, allowing the researcher to consider alternative explanations by systematically revisiting comments and connecting them to broader patterns evident in the comment and reply sequences.

Using social media content in research raises ethical concerns due to the sensitive nature of the exchanges taking place in the social media content, and this applies to posts considered public as well. While consent might not always be required for publicly available content, the article prioritized privacy by anonymizing data and quotations, to protect the identity of the individuals involved. Hence, due to privacy concerns of individuals who have shared posts and commented, the URLs and other identifiable information will be masked, and the quotes will be referred to in this article by using a unique identification number and the date of the post/comment. Researcher reflexivity was also identified as crucial for addressing ethical challenges when using social media content in research. Thus, the article focused on understanding participation frameworks shaped by social media platform's terms of service, complying with those terms of use when choosing and extracting content, recognizing potential biases arising from the platform, and considering authenticity issues in gauging user dispositions for content coding. Furthermore, writing about the digital discourses of victimhood required exercising sensitivity and empathy towards the experiences and actions of those on social media. The affective and moral notions were identified through the comments. Although Facebook allows 8000 characters, most of the comments in the chosen posts were short texts or contained only emojis, hashtags, and gifs. Thus, a critical perspective, involving questioning and challenging assumptions, beliefs, and values that might influence the research outcome was used.

Locating the Action: Aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombings

Victimhoods that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks mainly included the Catholic community, including those who faced the attacks, killed, wounded and traumatized by the event. Thus, the initial frames of victimhood were associated with the "individuals and groups" considered to be "weak, threatened, and in need of help" (Chmutina et al., 2022, p. 1). Incidentally, the initial forms of victimhood align with the vulnerability dimension of victimhood, in which individuals and communities are identified as susceptible and in need of protection. Vulnerability discourses are effective in drawing attention, invoking pity and rallying support for the victims. The victimhood identifications based on vulnerability are accepted and propagated by political regimes, bureaucrats and the media. Thus, the victimhood narratives based on vulnerability can also reinforce power structures and maintain the status quo.

However, with the passage of time, the initial victimhood came to be identified as a 'threat'. This happened as the victims became disillusioned with the outcome of the report presented by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) into the Easter Sunday bombings and called for accountability and justice. Thus, the Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, levelled criticism against the PCoI report on Easter Sunday bombings presented in 2021 as "incomplete", stating that despite the PCoI "conduc[ting] its inquiries to the best of its ability", the report presented does not do justice to the victims of the attacks (Weerasooriya, 2021a). The allegations resulted in an ultimatum being given to the government, as stated in the newspaper headline: "The Cardinal throws ultimatum to [the] government to arraign perpetrators of the Easter carnage (Weerasooriya, 2021b; See also Jeyaraj, 2021).

The discontent arising from the lack of justice and accountability reached new heights when Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith addressed the 49th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 7, 2022, claiming that "despite numerous requests, the incumbent government has failed to meet out justice" (Archdiocese of Colombo Sri Lanka, 2022). He also stated that the initial inquiries into the incident "identified [the] attacks as the work of the Muslim fundamentalists, [however], later investigations have revealed the massacre as a grand political plot" (Archdiocese of Colombo Sri Lanka, 2022). In his address, he also requested an impartial probe by UNHRC, stating that successive governments have failed to provide justice to the victims. Therefore, the three-year time period up to the point that Jehan Appuhamy carried the cross, illustrated the initial victimhood gradually turning into a perceived threat.

According to Chmutina et al., victims who dare to speak out for themselves, calling for accountability and justice from those in power, including the government

and bureaucratic institutions, often cease to be victims and become increasingly identified as a threat by the power holders (2022). Victimhoods that are identified, understood and sanctioned within the "vulnerability" paradigm need to be associated with some sort of weakness or a vulnerability that justifies protection from the state. But once the state becomes challenged by those victims, the latter is often denied the right to be identified as a victim within the particular timespace configuration. Essentially the socio-political and institutional dimensions affect the individual's and community's ability to obtain recognition and justice for their plight. Thus, dimensions such as social inequality, discrimination, the prevailing socio-political culture, institutional structures and processes, access to information, and decision-making processes could indeed affect victim's prospects for attaining justice and redress.

Furthermore, during this period, a reversal of the framing of victimhood induced by right-wing demagoguery can be identified in the political discourses in the media. Right-wing populist demagoguery is driven by nativist and protectionist tendencies. Furthermore, they often critique globalization and engage in exclusivist rhetoric to mobilize the masses around a prominent political figure. The identification of victimhood perpetuated by right-wing populist rhetoric in Sri Lanka bears a connection with the decades long war in the North-east in Sri Lanka between the government forces and the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Ealam. Although the war ended in 2009, the political rhetoric of the populist right-wing in Sri Lanka drew from those animosities to appeal to *the people* (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022; Gaul, 2021; Gamage, 2021). Gaul analyzing seventy speeches delivered by the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa from 2005 to 2015 identifies that the "representations … perpetuate the simplified dichotomy of victims and perpetrators" (2020, p. 103), with us in opposition to the terrorist other (p. 102). She identifies this as intricately connected with the "authoritarianist and nationalist" tendencies of the "populist performance in Sri Lanka" (p. 96). According to Gamage, Sri Lankan right-wing rhetoric was used to create an impression that the authentic people of the country are facing a threat from the 'other' due to corrupt elites liaising with the international other (Gamage, 2021, p. 138). Therefore, the dominant frame of victimhood during the past decades had been the victimhood of the right-wing populist elements in power.

Thus, the victimhood frames relating to Easter Sunday attacks were in competition with the victimhood propagated by the authoritarian populist regime, with the latter highlighting victimhood associated with the majority Sinhala Buddhists, security forces, the sovereignty of the country and the regime in power (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022; See also Gaul, 2020; Ferdinando, 2021, 2022). This shift in framing can be seen in a number of local-state-sponsored and private media reports reflecting the broader and deeply entrenched discourse of right-wing populist

politics in the country. There was intense and prolonged media concentration on international interventions, war heroes being taken to courts, and fears that invisible forces, both local and international, were attacking the majority population. Populist leaders weaponized the rhetoric to draw attention to the plight of the majority as unfairly treated while attempting to justify a set of discriminatory policies and actions against the other (See Gaul, 2020; Kyle & Meyer, 2020). Thus, the victimhood frames of the "weak and vulnerable" were utilized in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombings to reinforce nationalist narratives and promote a sense of unity among the Sinhala Buddhist majority. It reflects Brubaker's idea that populist political discourses, particularly those that deal with 'the people', are constituted vertically and horizontally (2017, 2020). Consequently, once the initial pity died down, the dominant depiction of victimhood in the local scenario (including media) was one where 'the people' were horizontally negotiated – against ethnic and religious others. Such negotiations also encouraged supporters "to self-identify as victims based on felt precarity, encouraging the well-off and privileged to adopt the mantle of victimhood at the expense of those who occupy more objectively fraught positions" (Johnson, 2017, p. 2). Eventually, such identifications of victimhood led to stigmatizing those 'other' communities in the country perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Chronotopic negotiation of carrying the cross

Despite numerous requests made by the Catholic Church and the Catholic community to bring justice to the Easter attack victims, in 2022, they were still waiting for the "promised justice" to materialize. In such a context where three years have elapsed after the attacks, actor Jehan Appuhamy began his march for justice and accountability from Katuwapitiya Church in Negombo on April 19, 2022, and reached Galle Face on April 22, 2022, covering almost 40km carrying a cross on his shoulder. The action coincided with the third anniversary of the attacks and the mass protests against the regime in power. The protests had started earlier in March 2022 and turned into a fully-fledged island-wide protest, with Galle Face being the central point.[5] Masses affected by the economic downturn and discontented with corrupt politics took to the streets, showing their disgruntlement and requesting a "system change" (Wijedasa & Weerasinghe, 2022). Against this backdrop, the incident in which Jehan Appuhamy carried the cross to join the mass protests provides an interesting case study for examining the chronotopic unfolding of victimhood in Sri Lanka. The incident highlights the temporal and spatial dimensions of the narrative

[5] From April 2022, Galle Face, a prominent coastal area in Colombo, Sri Lanka, became a focal point of people's protests. The demonstrations in the Galle Face and other parts of the country served as a channel for citizens to demand justice, accountability, and reform, while also voicing their concerns about various issues affecting their lives. The protests highlighted the power of public mobilization and the role that symbolic spaces like Galle Face can play in shaping the narrative of a nation's collective grievances.

and the contested nature of victimhood discourses during the third commemoration of the Easter Sunday attacks in 2022.

The data consists of four Facebook posts along with their comment sequences. The posts were shared by a Sri Lankan artist, a public figure cum photographer, a news company with a religious affinity, and an activist connected with the people's protest. The post shared on the Facebook page of a prominent Sri Lankan artist gained significant traction, with a very high number of likes, comments, and shares. The post features a thought-provoking meme, where Jehan Appuhamy is portrayed carrying the cross, while images of the Easter Sunday blast serve as the backdrop. The meme is accompanied by the text that reads, "They killed them" and "For Justice." The hashtag #GoHomeGota2022 is displayed underneath the post, visibly connecting the post to the people's protest. The second post features Jehan with a family member taken after entering Galle Face. Despite the seemingly non-controversial content, the post sparked significant interest and engagement, featuring over a thousand comments. The third post contains a video posted on April 19, 2022, featuring the actor carrying the cross through the streets of Colombo at the early stages of the journey. The scenes depict the support received from the masses along the way. The final post also features a video capturing the blessings given to the actor towards the latter part of his three-day journey. The video was posted on April 22, 2022, and received instant and robust engagement, lasting over 24 hours. Overall, the four posts contain vibrant exchanges of different views which highlight diverse aspects of the action.

The initial talk about the incident on Facebook showed support for both the actor and the cause of seeking justice for the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks. Words of encouragement, blessings, and pledges of support dominated the discourse. The digital interactions afforded the Catholic community and the supporters of the act to express their pent-up sentiments of three years. The dominant support was interrupted on and off with comments critiquing the act and references to political unrest simmering in the country. Overall, the initial discourses recorded acknowledgment and backing from Facebook users who inhabited the discussion within the comment sequence.

As the march for justice progressed, the dominant discourse of support in the digital space was challenged by those who critiqued the act. The critique reached its peak at the last stages of the journey on April 22, 2022, upon entering the protest site at Galle Face. The critiques centered around acting (රංගනය), attributions of heroism (වීරයා) and suspicions about the involvement of local and international civil organizations. The identifications with 'acting' ("ranganaya") challenged the authenticity of the act, infusing it with distrust as to the motives behind the initiative. The talk centered around heroism drew on the dichotomous hero-villain portrayals to

undermine the effort while suspicions about an "invisible hand" further sedimented the image of the anti-hero.

Counter responses to critiques were immediate and constituted the bulk of the comment-reply data and revolved around answering or dispelling the critique. For instance, the equation of the action to an 'act' (ranganaya) triggered responses almost instantly from the supporters and well-wishers of the actor and his endeavor, and the exchanges between the two groups (the supporters and critiques of 'act') dragged on for several days. One particular comment "Good act...!!" (හොඳ රංගනයක්...!!) (FBCI, 2022, April 22) alone was able to trigger over a hundred responses. The equation of the act to a mere 'act' was identified as reducing or demeaning the efforts to seek justice and redress. A majority of the Facebook users within the exchange felt insulted and humiliated by the comment with a considerable number of users engaging in counter-attacks. The counter-discourses drew parallels with the 'act' of the Rajapaksas, referring to the populist performance staged during the presidencies of Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa[6] (see, Yilmaz & Morrison, 2022; Kyle & Meyer, 2020; Gaul, 2021) while others claimed it as a call for justice that has been delayed for so long coming from those who experienced or vividly remember the ravages of the blast. Thus, anyone who critiqued the action as an 'act' was constituted as a deviant of the particular time-space configuration of mounting unrest and resistance characterized by the people's protest. The counter-discourses on 'act' posed a challenge to the well-established right-wing populist political mobilizations of the regime in power.

Thus, the mass support visible on the streets and at the protest site was also reflected online through social media. Unknown congregations of people thronged the digital space regardless of their spatiotemporal location. Inevitably, Facebook became a space where support and dissent for carrying the cross were negotiated while giving voice to citizens' dissent by merging with the ongoing protests against the government. The victimhood frames emerging through the digital space during the study from April 21 to the beginning of May 2022 coincided with the justice narrative of those seeking justice and redress for the victims, the threat-based and largely weaponized victimhood narrative of the right-wing politics (See Gaul, 2020; Gamage, 2021; Yilmaz & Morieson, 2021) as well as the emerging disgruntlement-solidarity narrative of the people's protest. The Facebook coverage essentially captured the fragmented narratives of rival victimhood. The people's protest was able to rally diverse communities together for a common cause against the existing power holders. However, the underlying feelings of victimhood that drew them together were not necessarily the same; thus, the calls for justice included justice for the Easter

[6] President Mahinda Rajapaksha was in office from 2005 to 2015 representing Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and his brother Gotabhaya Rajapaksha held the office of the president representing Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) from 2019 to mid-2022.

attack victims and the victims of the economic crisis in the country. Moreover, the segments that opposed the action also expressed victimhood, often constructing them horizontally against the ethnic and political other. Thus, the victimhood rivalries, among the supporters and the critics of the march became apparent within the comment-reply exchanges on social media with each group vying for visibility over the other. The incident posed a challenge to the dominant narratives of victimhood in political and media discourses on Easter Sunday attacks; the initial identification of victimhood with the Catholic community and the subsequent shift to those identified by the prevailing right-wing populist politics came face-to-face on social media along with yet another dimension of victimhood based on disgruntlement-solidarity narrative.

Affective dimension: Shades of disgruntlement

The particular moment where the walk for justice merged with the people's protest at Galle Face signified a convergence of multiple disgruntlements within the people's protest. The convergence grew out of multiple disgruntlements against the prevailing state of affairs. Disgruntlement signifies a state of dissatisfaction or frustration arising from a sense of resentment, bitterness or disconnection (Martin et al., 2018; See also Gamson, 1990). The concept has often been associated with the literature on dissent, political activism and protest movements and lately with the 'mass protest' or 'people's movement' (Gukurume, 2017; Martin et al., 2018). In the context of mass protests, disgruntlement can act as a powerful motivator of collective action, driving individuals and communities to come together to challenge the existing order of things and demand change. Thus, disgruntlement served to mobilize and rally support for the on-the-ground action happening across the streets up to the site of the protest in the digital space.

Disgruntlement is also a complex affective state shaped by various factors, including perceived injustice, frustrated expectations, and a sense of disconnection from society. Disgruntlement is dominant in the post-comment sequences. However, disgruntlement is multifaceted, with multiple parties expressing their disgruntlement. Thus, it comes as a bundle of interwoven affects. For instance, the disgruntlement within the justice narrative showed widespread dissatisfaction with the prevailing regime, claiming non-accountability and evasion of justice and redress. According to Snow et al., disgruntlement stems from "a sense of injustice and grievance that is deeply felt by members of a social movement" (1986, p. 467). Injustices and grievances were expressed in terms of delay in justice in the following expressions: "Punish those connected with the attacks, Jesus (FBC2, 2022, April 23) (පාස්කුවට සම්බන්ධ උන්ට දඩුවම් දෙන්න Jesuni"); "Justice for the affected families" ("Dukata pathwu paul walata sadaranaya ituwewa") (FBC3, 2022, April 23); and "He was carrying the pain and suffering of people in Katuwapitiya" (''ඔහු ගෙනිච්චේ කටුවපිටියේ

මිනිසුන්ගේ වේදනාව...'')(FBC4, 2022, April 23). The injustices and grievances arising from economic and political turmoil came to be expressed as follows: "More than half of the people cannot fulfill their basic needs" (''රටෙන් බාගෙකට වඩා මූලික අවශ්‍යතා සම්පූර්ණ කරගන්න බැරිව දුක් විඳිනවා'') (FBC5, 2022, April 22); and "Victory to the protest. We want Sri Lanka" ("*aragalayata jaya*. We want Sri Lanka") (FBC6, 2022, April 23), while also sharing image posts showing the general public affected due to gas, electricity and fuel price hikes with those responsible flying away with a bag of dollars (FBC7, 2022, April 26). Thus, the discourses of injustice and grievance were intricately woven within the expressions of disgruntlement.

Prolonged disgruntlement heightens the feelings of frustration already present within the individuals and groups who await justice. Frustration is a feeling of discontent arising from unmet expectations. Given that the expected justice was not served for almost three years; those who sought justice felt a disconnection with something they deemed 'important' to move forward with their lives. The passage of time also brought in the feeling that the existing order would not bring the desired justice. The social media exchanges also reflected that justice is, in fact, too far off. Consequently, the 'frustrations' over unfulfilled expectations shaped disgruntlement and action, as those segments are more likely to become discontented and mobilize for change. The social media engagement with the chosen posts indicated feelings of frustration over not being able to fulfill their expectations to attain justice in the following exchanges: "God, it is the time for justice" (''දෙවියනි යුක්තිය ඉටුකලයුතු වේලාව හරි'') (FBC8, 2022, April 24); "He [*referring to the actor*] spoke for those innocent people when there is still no justice for … that barbaric act!" (FBC9, 2022, April 24); and "The Easter Massacre still does NOT rest the Souls in Peace..." (FBC10, 2022, April 23). Moreover, hashtags, emojis and blessings were used to indicate discontent over the socio-economic hardships imposed on people as a result of the prevailing socio-economic situation of the country (FBC11, 2022, April 22).[7] Both instances indicate a general disgruntlement and frustration triggered by a loss of faith in the prevailing order. Consequently, the discontent (arising from the lack of justice and public resentment over having to face the consequences of corrupt and inefficient regimes of power over the years) turned into a powerful motivator to extend collective action in both GotaGogama at Galle Face and across the country. The disgruntlement over the status quo also triggered positive sets of affects among

[7] #bringsnewyoungleadersforsrilanka #ArrestRajapakshas #GiveOurStolenMoneyBack #anonymousforthevoiceless #helpless #SaveSriLanka #findstolenmoney #PeoplesMoney #itspeople #SaveTheChildren #savethefuture #savemymotherland #GotaGoHome2022 #CorruptPoliticians #Anonymoushelpsrilanka #AnonymousSaveSriLanka #giveourstolenmone

We stand together as one nation.
Please give our country back.
Don't destroy our country.
We want a future

the protesters. Such feelings were mainly driven by the need to come together to achieve a common interest. Hence, amid the general feeling of discontent, there were instances of love, care and solidarity, often notwithstanding the ethnic, religious and political lines of division with people of diverse faiths and political affiliations posting messages of praise and encouragement for carrying the cross. These segments welcomed the action of carrying the cross, even going to the extent of defending the act as a quest for justice in the following words: "GOD bless our country and our people" (FBC12, 2022, April 19); "Blessings of the Buddha. Blessings of the Jesus"[8] (FBC13, 2022, April 22) and "Jehan, you are a hero to the Catholic people, a pride for everyone. … May the Buddha bless you. That is according to my religion"[9] (FBC14, 2022, April 23). As a result, the common disgruntlement led participants in the post-comment sequences to identify common ground, organize and voice together expressing common grievances.

Moral-political dimension

The moral-political dimension of victimhood refers to the ways in which individuals and groups conceptualize and articulate their ethical beliefs and values in the context of victimhood negotiations. Zentz identifies them as normative positions and valuations brought by individuals and groups to socio-political debates, often revolving around victimhood and vulnerability discourses (2021). The moral-political dimension often explores ethics, beliefs and values, while digging deeper into assumptions relating to social relations, power, freedom and justice. In examining the emerging moral-political dimension, this article identifies three core themes – moral outrage, empathy and solidarity towards the act.

The moral outrage[10] understood as a form of righteous anger was reflected in 'for and against' discourses based on "baiyas and non-baiyas", "sincerity of the action" and "heroes". '*Baiya*' is in general a derogatory Sinhala term used to refer to persons lacking in sophistication. However, the term was heavily used to refer to the supporters of the existing regime during the people's protest of 2022 while *non-baiyas* refer to those who critique the *baiyas* and their actions. The exchanges between the *baiyas* and *non-baiyas* were largely framed through the expressions of disgruntlement of those in favor of bearing the cross (including the protesters) and those against it and continue to favor the existing order. Those who continued to support the ruling regime identified the act of bearing the cross as a threat to the dominant majority, thus aligning with the right-wing populist political rhetoric

[8] ''බුදු සරණයි. ජේසු පිහිටයි.''

[9] ''ජෙහාන්, ඔබ කතෝලික ජනතාවට වීරයෙක්, සියල්ලන්ටම ආඩම්බරයක්... ඔබට තෙරුවන් සරණයි, ඒ මගේ ආගමට අනුව.''

[10] A sense of moral indignation or anger in response to perceived injustices or harms, often expressed through public condemnation or protest.

and labeling the act as an expression of religious fundamentalism. Similarly, those in support of the march and the protest displayed righteous anger claiming even if the perpetrators (referring to allegations of corruption of the regime in power) themselves accept they stole [money] the *baiyas* will never accept any fault with the regime (FBC15, 2022, April 23).[11] Thus, the political and religious values became a point of contention in constituting victimhood and innocence, allowing different categories to express their victimhood.

Furthermore, questions regarding the sincerity of the actions surfaced at different intervals indicating the act was staged to gain mass support within the protest. The actor was labelled as an opportunist acting for publicity by carrying the cross. One comment indicated that bringing justice to the perpetrators may not be the aim of the act (FBC16, 2022, April 23),[12] while another claimed that actors should not dupe the public (FBC17, 2022, April 23). Lack of sincerity was also depicted using past actions and remarks, thus bringing the past into the here-and-now discourses. The comment "not an actor but a hero" (FBC18, 2022, April 24)[13] was targeted at dispelling negative identifications with dishonest and insincere actions. However, the comment reflected yet another moral outrage based on what is considered heroic. The construction of the act as a heroic act, included both factions making comparisons with the war heroes. Moral outrage was directed at the actor by the critiques of the act for his efforts which they saw as incomparable to that of the war hero, while the supporters of the act used the tagline of the hero to counter claims of insincerity by portraying the act as heroic and the carrier of the cross as the people's hero and a symbol of justice and faith.

The moral-political talk of the segment that supported the protests and the march for justice fostered a space for the emergence of empathy and solidarity over negative affects. The protest talk during the incident (which included sharing hashtags and pledging support for the protest) carried positive vibes containing recognition, mutual understanding of their discontent and a common need to defeat the enemy – i.e., the prevailing order. The general sense of disgruntlement owing to a disconnection with the existing socio-political status quo was responsible for the emergence of empathetic and shared feelings. Individuals and groups who came together in support of the protest within the data set felt that their values and beliefs did not tally with the existing socio-political environment and thus organized together in protest, aligning together those who were once divided due to ethnicity, religion and political affiliation. The supporters expressed a belief in solidarity, as indicated in the following words: "No to the characters and yes to the system" (FBC19, 2022,

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[11] ''..... අපි හොරකං කරා කියල පිළිගත්තත් බයියෝ පිළිගන්නෑ මල්ලි. බයි තියරිය ඕකයි.''

[12] ''පාස්කු ප්‍රහාරයේ අපරාධකරුවන් විනාශ කිරීම ජෙහාන්ගේ අරමුණ යැයි නොසිතමි. ''

[13] ''නලුවෙක් නෙවෙයි වීරයෙක්''

April 23).[14] They also shared the belief that boosting politicians and the like have resulted in the current situation (FBC20, 2022, April 23),[15] thus calling for a political order which functions through appropriate structures and mechanisms.

The discussions also revolved around religion, essentially questioning the proclamations and affiliations of the commenters on Facebook. Despite comments that questioned religious faiths and acts, the majority of the protesters identified with harmony and collective action, thus denouncing divisions based on religion and political affiliation. One Facebook user commented saying "Jehan carries the cross while his friend awaits him [at the protest site – fasting]. Muslims and Hindus watering the road to reduce the heat – How far they have divided us?"[16] (FBC21, 2022, April 23) while another commented stating "proud of you if the attempt is devoid of [political] parties and colors"[17] (FBC22, 2022, April 24). Thus, the moral political frames became a means through which consensus and dissent over victimhood were shaped and mobilized.

Chronotopic belonging

The discussions on affective and moral political dimensions presented above show masked victimhood. The chronotopic negotiation of disgruntlement, moral outrage, empathy and solidarity carried undertones of rival victimhood which took shape in the digital space as a collective yet differential attribution of victimhood. In other words, victimhood discourses underpin different sets of affects and moral-political notions in conversation with each other thus underpinning the larger issues of belonging or disbelonging. According to Anthias, "people belong together when they share values, relations, and practices thus pointing to commonality, mutuality and attachment (2006, as cited in Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 115). Although the term belonging is very much closer to identity, it is not synonymous with the latter. Belonging refers to "continuous negotiations between individuals and collectivities" (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 114). Thus, the concept of belonging is characterized as "socially shared... value attribu[tions]" to particular collectivizations (Blommaert & De Fina, 2017, p. 3; see also Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011). Thus, the desired and non-desired behaviors recorded in digital interactions depict differential forms of digital belonging. The right-wing populist undertones and vocalizations of resistance in the comment sequences underpin not only masked rival victimhood but also different degrees of social inclusion and exclusion. This was evident in the exchanges between

[14] ''චරිත අනවශ්‍යයි. ක්‍රමයක් අවශ්‍යයි. talk within the People's protests"

[15] ''අපි කවුරුත් පුම්බන්න ඕනෙ නැහැ නමුත් වැරදි දේශපාලන චරිත නිසා අපි හැමෝම බැට කනවා එත් මිනිස්සු තේරුම් ගන්නෙ නෑ''

[16] ''කතෝලික යාළුවා ජෙහාන් කුරුසේ කරේ තියන් එනකං බෞද්ධ යාළුවා කලන නිරාහාරව මඟ බලන් ඉන්නවා, මුස්ලිම්, හින්දු උන් ටික ගිනියම් පාර නිමන්න වතුර දානවා... උන් අපිව කොච්චර දුරස් කලාද?''

[17] "Paksha, patawalin thorawa karanam oba gana adambarai.... Jayawewa....."

the critiques of the action and the counter-response from the supporters discussed in the previous sections. Similarly, the known and ratified members (followers and fans on Facebook) of those who supported the action were in interaction with the unknown critics who had allegedly created fake accounts to launch a digital attack against the march for justice[18] (FBC23, 2022, April 24). Thus, it is evident that the behavior taken as inclusive, ratified, or accepted depends largely on the timespace configurations within which the action occurs.

The social media exchanges also indicated potentialities, thus approaching the issue of victimhood depictions in two ways – i.e., reinforcement and challenge. In the digital realm, debates around reinforcing current power dynamics, exclusivity, and the resistance to sociopolitical hierarchies have materialized as counter narratives of victimhood. Both assent and dissent for the incident were negotiated in interaction. The divisions that stem from ethnic and political differences within the people's protest are evident in the comments, where some participants expressed concerns about the inclusion of religious symbols at the protest site – a shared space that voiced against socio-political division (FBC24, 2022, April 22).[19] However, the majority consensus in the dataset showed positive vibes, expressing solidarity and belonging. The practice of blessing indicated an emerging consensus, with a significant number of commenters often invoking blessing words from multiple religions within a single comment (FBC25, 2022, April 22; FBC26, 2022, April 27).[20] The action resonated throughout the post-comment sequences and was quite powerful in negotiating support for both the march for justice and the people's protest.

According to Martin et al., disgruntlement is a latent element that manifest[s] in movement support (2018, p. 13). Thus, a shared sense of disgruntlement resulting from a lack of justice, accountability, and loss of faith in the existing status quo mobilized the masses to challenge the dominant power structures and lobby for change. Snow et al. associate collective action as one that mobilize or activate [protest] adherents so that they move, metaphorically, from the balcony to the barricades; [and convert] bystanders into adherents, thus broadening the movement's base, and to neutralize or demobilize adversaries (2019, p. 395). Nevertheless, the difference in the people's protest lies in the self-forming properties – being leaderless, not driven by prominent ideological and political interests, and displaying a need to trigger change rather than grab power. The digital consensus thus displayed characteristics opposed to the construction and mobilization of '*the people*' characterized as

[18] "….. haha for real? tells the guy with a fake fb account"

[19] ''ආගමික අරගලයක් ද කරන්නේ සියලු ආගම් එකමුතු වෙලා අරගලය කරන්න කුරුසයක් ඇයි අරගලයට'' (Blessings of the Buddha...Blessings of the God to you and all the protesters)

[20] ''බුදු සරණයි ජේසු පිහිටයි'' (Blessings of the Buddha! Blessings of the Jesus!) and "Budu saranai dewi pihitai obata saha siyaluma aaragala karuwanta"

driven around an identified leader, ideology, or political party with the mainstream media being used to distract and weaponize masses against individuals and groups considered as 'other'. Hence, the shared sense of disgruntlement in the digital space was able to infuse a sense of action and consensus while also dispelling adversaries who weaponized ethnic and religious resentment through divisive talk using text, images, and emojis.

In such a context, the populist rhetoric which found currency in local politics and media in the past lost its appeal within the victimhood exchanges in the digital space. Moreover, the exchanges indicate sentiments of right-wing populists as transgressive and out of sync with the emerging order. Thus, the social media exchanges on Jehan carrying the cross redefined what is normative and thus permissible within the digital discourse.

In addition, the recurrence of specific identifications and counter-identifications of victimhood compelled social media users to align and support. Hence, the support for collective action was more or less a search for friends over enemies. Martin et al., claim that individuals' ideological leanings channel the discontent in preferred directions due to ideologues' conceptions of the organization of friends and enemies (2018, p. 13). Carrying the cross and entering Galle Face, the focal site of the protest and the ensuing social media exchanges reflected convergences and commonalities in an expanding hybrid media context. The offline action and discourses merged together with the online in diverse ways seeking friends and rallying support to challenge the prevailing order while also addressing dissent by answering to elements that wanted to perpetuate the existing power balances.

Overall, digital belonging emerges out of a similarity in difference – not fixed but light forms of belonging - largely consisting of unknown and migratory users who were able to tap into some form of shared commonality to mobilize together. Belonging in relation to the incident was not limited to one specific group or community but spanned across economic strata and ethnic, religious, and political affiliations. Thus, the intersection of the march for justice and the people's protest indicated a broad spectrum of people supporting the action both on the ground and online. It was a hybrid moment that attracted support from diverse segments, both horizontal and vertical.

Thus, smaller yet interconnected fragments nested within a shared feeling of disgruntlement were quite visible within the social media exchanges indicating that digital belonging in relation to victimhood discourses is fractally nested in particular timespace configurations. Fractal nestings highlight how belonging can be extended from one's immediate environment to the larger collectives. The smaller pockets of disgruntlement in the comment exchanges associate with larger authoritarian and resistance discourses. It was also fluid, rather extensive, and included both thick

and light identifications of belonging. However, it was a moment where light forms of belonging overpowered the thick ones in interaction. In addition, the concept of fractal belonging highlights agency and action – since individuals and groups can navigate their sense of belonging by negotiating common ground as was evident in re-configurations of what is normative and accepted in the timespace. More to the point, the action that took place on Facebook exchanges indicated a materialization of a new kind of 'harmony' fueled by acknowledgment of each other's predicament and consensus to act together. With the disgruntlement fully functional in the digital space, there was an emergence of much-anticipated unity and harmony within the comment exchanges. Successive political regimes and international backing over the years failed to create a collective consensus even as close to what materialized within those Facebook exchanges. Perhaps, decades of investment in teaching social harmony in universities and schools and dissemination via media and workshops could have had an impact. Nevertheless, it was a moment of potential where shared understanding and embracing of differences emerged through the hybrid space.

Conclusion

Rival victimhood discourses refer to competing claims of victimhood in the digital space. These discourses are often characterized by conflicting affective and moral political frames, as various groups assert their own experiences of victimhood and suffering while also disputing the claims presented by other groups. As a result, the negotiations of victimhood rivalries often depend on associations of affective and moral political judgments. The findings indicate disgruntlement as a shared affective state attached with particular moral evaluations. These affective and moral evaluations played a crucial role in shaping understandings and responses to rival expressions of victimhood while also triggering collective action in response to perceived grievances. Fractal belonging emerges through the discourses based on victimhood, innocence, threat, and solidarity exchanges. The analysis identifies carrying of the cross as a call for a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of victimhood, one that recognizes the suffering of diverse fragments as intricately connected with the larger socio-political domain.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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