

Book Review

Title	: <i>Twelve Cries from Home: In Search of Sri Lanka's Disappeared</i>
Author	: Minoli Salgado
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Minoli Salgado's *Twelve Cries from Home: In Search of Sri Lanka's Disappeared* is a vivid description of post-civil war Sri Lanka where the author skillfully weaves together the intricate web of pain, resilience, collective and personal trauma experienced by those who have undergone familial loss and have experienced the first-hand encounters with tragedy. Salgado's narrative non-fiction explores the collective memory of a nation torn apart by social, religious, and political turmoil in addition to the distinctive narratives of twelve war survivors. In 2018, Minoli Salgado embarked upon a visit to her ancestral home in Sri Lanka to conduct interviews with both Sinhalese and Tamil citizens. Here, her work can be interpreted as a scholarly endeavour to investigate the multifaceted repercussions of the three-decade-long civil war that continues to plague the quotidian life of the Sri Lankans. In her preface to the book, Radhika Coomaraswamy states that *Twelve Cries from Home* is a travel narrative and the first book to capture the civilian testimonies around Sri Lanka during the war's end. Salgado's neutrality is a crucial component of her work; she deftly portrays the agony faced by Sinhalese and Tamils without resorting to prejudice. Due to this objectivity, readers are able to fully understand the spectrum of human suffering during the three-decade conflict. The book is divided into four sections by the author, which represent four important places in Sri Lanka: Matara, Kandy, Batticaloa, and Jaffna. Each section provides a contextual framework that facilitates the conduct of interviews with war

victims. Salgado's meticulous choice of subjects and settings offers an extensive comprehension of the various repercussions of war around the country. Salgado's description of her book as a "memoir of survival after losses" establishes the framework for an investigation of perseverance in the face of unfathomable adversity. Her narrative technique, which combines survivor testimonials with her own memories of Sri Lanka bestows a profound richness upon the narrative. A critical approach is deemed vital as this merging of personal and collective narratives occasionally renders it challenging to distinguish between the author's subjective experiences and the survivors' objective reality. While articulating the inherent fragmentation and non-linearity that characterizes the war victim's narratives, the author aims to maintain the original framework of the testimonies. Salgado emphasizes the resulting narrative as a "nomadic centre of meaning," performing the role of an astute witness-bearer. This intentional disarray of the narratives accurately captures the harrowing condition of the victims. Salgado skilfully negotiates the difficult terrain of forgiveness and healing in a country still dealing with the long-lasting effects of collateral damage caused by conflict.

The author, performing as a literary witness, adroitly captures the intricate nuances of the multifarious space in which sentiments of bitterness and forgiveness coalesce between the victims and their perpetrators. The narrative's precise presentation of each character's traumas attempts to reconcile the pain that both Sinhalese and Tamils collectively endure. In contrast, these interwoven narratives converge to depict a collective portrayal of human suffering and vulnerability within the tumultuous backdrop of a war zone. The notion of ambiguous loss is a recurring motif throughout the narratives, and Salgado adeptly portrays the narrators' liminal state—a perpetual struggle to determine the whereabouts of their missing family members—which oscillates between despair and hope.

Salgado's exploration of the political landscape adds a layer of complexity to the narrative. The integration of political narratives with personal accounts, such as Priya Sena's acknowledgment of the LTTE's role in the war, provides a broader context that questions the extent to which political events shape individual experiences. By linking their personal stories with historical events, Salgado offers a nuanced perspective on agency, resilience, and identity in the aftermath of trauma. However, the challenge lies in navigating the delicate balance between individual narratives and the broader socio-political context, a balance that occasionally tips towards the former. Salgado's portrayal of internally displaced individuals, notably through Chitradevi's story, adds depth to the exploration

of displacement and the perpetual battle for a sense of home. The concluding examination of war-torn collective memories offers a powerful insight into the fractured recollection of a nation haunted by double reclamation—both of the speaker and the subject.

Salgado masterfully captures the uneven and chaotic resurgence of memories, culminating in a collective memory of war victims. However, there is a presence of an ambiguity of this collective memory and its potential implications for historical accuracy. Salgado attempts to depict the plight of women who have lost their husbands in the war. Sujatha, another survivor, undergoes a perpetual trauma stemming from her unwillingness to accept her husband's demise. While communal solace among fellow widows offers intermittent relief, the collective trauma resurfaces hauntingly during their solitary moments. Sujatha's experience is emblematic of the transformative impact of violence and loss, evident in the altered domestic landscape wherein she becomes the breadwinner of her family. This transformation underscores the pervasive existential fear that permeates the lives of women bereaved of husbands and children. The altered domesticity necessitates an unfamiliar positioning for women within a once-familiar arena, disrupting their erstwhile sense of security and belonging.

The author particularly examines the phenomenon of enforced disappearance, emphasizing its role in perpetuating unresolved trauma among the victim-survivors that resurfaces with each of their exposure to subsequent acts of violence. The enduring psychological impact on victims is underscored, as they not only grapple with the absence of their loved ones but also carry the burden of the perpetrators within themselves. The struggle to reconcile with the uncertain fate of the missing family members becomes a poignant theme, with individuals torn between relinquishing the memories or confronting the elusive confirmation of their mortality. Through the narrative lens of testimonials, the victims articulate latent traumas, bringing them to the forefront of their consciousness. This process serves as a therapeutic mechanism, enabling a gradual recovery from the emotional wounds inflicted by the past. The act of recurrently recalling or revisiting historical events transforms into a cathartic practice, empowering survivors to navigate the complex terrain of their experiences. Priyasena, one of the victim-survivors grappling with the profound loss of his son, who disappeared subsequent to enlisting in the Sinhala army disengage from both the collective war memory and his individual trauma as a coping mechanism to escape the bereavement. Here, Salgado's work can be seen as a concerted effort to amplify the voices of numerous

war survivors who, despite willingly engaging in their battles, find themselves entangled in the intricate politics of collective remembrance and intentional forgetfulness.

The author's poignant articulation of Rifaideen's survival story, marred by the profound impact of a major bomb blast, resonates with the overarching objective of the narrative. In stating, "I am here to write his story and that of others whose lives were so reduced, whose lives may not have a historical register at all," Salgado positions herself as a chronicler seeking to document the narratives of those whose experiences may otherwise be marginalized or omitted from historical discourse. *Twelve Cries from Home* is undoubtedly a significant addition to the literature on war narratives, offering a nuanced and empathetic exploration of the human cost of conflict. Salgado's ability to convey the profound impact of loss on individuals and communities is commendable. In conclusion, Minoli Salgado's work stands as a compelling testament to the resilience of those who have endured the ravages of war. Congruently, the book has navigated the broader understanding of post-war Sri Lanka and the complexities of survival and resilience among the victim-survivors.

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