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**TRACING ABSENT PRESENCE: RETHINKING POLITICAL COMMUNITY  
IN THE WAKE OF ATROCITY**

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Forced disappearance is one of the most insidious forms of violence as it seeks to obliterate the body and indefinitely extends and exacerbates the grief of those left behind. In this paper, I consider how such chronic mourners 'reinhabit the world' in the face of continuously deferring loss, and seek to theorise what might be its political outcome(s). Arguing that this re-inhabiting is a constant tracing of traces given the ambiguous nature of the disappeared's status of absence, and thus presence, I explore a particular 'identification with suffering' that is embraced and embodied by Sinhala women whose children were 'disappeared' during the second People's Liberation Front (JVP) uprising (1988-1993). In such a context, visual and tactile objects such as photographs and clothing, I suggest, become especially meaningful by reasserting the presence of the disappeared. In conclusion, I engage Judith Butler's contention that grief is a tie that binds and thus enables the imagining of alternative political communities to reflect on how such a conceptualization might be helpful to re-invigorate political communities in Sri Lanka.

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